Bringing Environmental Issues into Church Life & Bringing Faith-based motivations into the Environmental movement: What role can faith play in addressing environmental problems?

Submitted by Derk Jan Harmannij to the University of Exeter
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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that any material that has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University has been acknowledged.

(Signature) ……

Abstract

In recent years many people have started to see religious institutions as valuable actors in addressing environmental problems. However, beyond well-known statements by faith leaders, much remains understudied about how 'ordinary believers' engage with the often novel and polarised issue of environmental problems. Therefore, by building on existing research about postsecularity and 'religion and the environment' this thesis wants to understand how believers engage with the environment, both in the context of the church and within the wider society through collaboration with secular groups. Firstly, it will critique the approach that human geography scholarship has taken towards Habermas and his idea of postsecularity. Secondly, it seeks to understand how local churches relate and engage with the environment. Thirdly, it wants to understand how environmentally concerned Christians from a faith-based environmental group attempt to give environmental issues a more prominent place in church life and lastly, this thesis wants to understand how environmentally concerned Christians join secular groups on shared concerns about the planet. In its findings this thesis will be critical and point out the many struggles and difficulties that churches and environmentally concerned Christians face when they try to get involved with environmental issues. But it will also portray hopeful aspects such as the eco-church approach that one of the participating churches used and the strong faith-based motivations to address environmental problems that environmentally concerned Christians have.

This thesis will also argue that religion/faith doesn't make believers 'green' but if for example people have trust in science, have been raised in an environmentally minded household and are left wing than their religious belief can provide a deep and sincere faith-based commitment for protecting the environment. This thesis will also argue that many environmentally concerned Christians are involved in secular environmental groups and find many shared concerns with them but that secular environmental groups also have little attention for personal faith or even find it 'irrelevant'. The implications of this will be discussed and there will also be attention for the ways in which Christian environmental ethics can 'cross over' to the wider green movement and the rest of society.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

1.1: Introduction

Human activities are causing major environmental problems across the world. The range of problems is wide and includes things like air pollution and its related effects on health problems (Brook et al 2010; Volk et al 2013; Gehring et al 2010; Power et al 2011; Weuve et al 2012; Gauderman et al 2015; Calderón-Garcidueñas et al 2015; Bowatte et al 2015; Chen et al 2017), the accumulation of harmful waste in the environment (Jambeck et al 2015; Premalatha et al 2014; Rochman et al 2015; Lamb et al 2018), the extinction of species driven by overexploitation (Maxwell et al 2016; Dirzo et al 2015; McCauley et al 2015; Davis et al 2018; Hallmann et al 2017) and the use of pesticides that harm biodiversity (Geiger et al 2010; Beketov et al 2013; Goulson 2013; Bonmatin et al 2015; Pisa et al 2015; Stehle & Schulz 2015). However, the best-known environmental problem caused by humans is anthropogenic climate change. A vast body of research has shown that humans are changing the climate for worse (see for example Crowley 2000; Levitus et al 2001; Huber & Knutti 2012; Jones et al 2013; Schurer et al 2013; Gergis et al 2016; Medhaug et al 2017; Marsicek et al 2018). And well-known negative consequences of climate change include things like: sea level rise (Chen et al 2017; Levermann et al 2013; Jevrejeva et al 2012), the loss of biodiversity (Hoegh-Guldberg & Bruno 2010; Gottfried et al 2012; Pacifici et al 2017; Spooner et al 2018; Jensen et al 2018), negative effects on human health (Stephenson et al 2013; Costello et al 2009; McMichael 2013; Gasparrini et al 2017; Mora et al 2018; Haines & Ebi 2019) and climate change will also have negative effects on agriculture (Challinor et al 2014; Asseng et al 2014; Schlenker & Lobell 2010; Zhu et al 2018). These environmental problems are not only dangerous for polar bears, individuals living near polluting industry or people living below sea level. A Unicef study found that currently approximately 300 million children are living in areas where outdoor air pollution exceeds international standards by at least six times (Rees 2016), while another study found that the air pollution in London costs up to 9,500 lives every year (Walton et al 2015) and recent study found that in deepest oceans trenches (more than 10,000 meter deep) already all kinds of anthropogenic toxic and illegal chemicals are mounting up (Jamieson et al 2017). As such, all these problems then lead up to an urgent demand to address these environmental problems.

1.2: Addressing environmental problems

1.2.1: The different approaches to address environmental problems

There are different ways through which people have been trying to address these environmental problems. Inspired by publications like ‘Silent Spring’ (Carson 1961), ‘The Tragedy of the Commons’ (Hardin 1968) and ‘Limits to Growth’ (Meadows et al 1972) there was a demand for strong regulations by governments which was

often combined with vocal protests and direct action, especially during the 60's and 70's. Such an activist approach is often very direct, highly visible and always political (Chatterton et al 2013). This direct-action approach is strongly focused on governmental action and although such environmental activism still does exist it has mostly been replaced with an approach that focuses on changing the behaviour of individuals through their consumption (Schlosberg & Coles 2016; Spaargaren & Mol 2008). Nowadays, people are urged to use public transport, buy local products, eat sustainably caught fish or improve the insulation of their homes in order to reduce the impact that they have on the environment. This is a much more passive form of engagement with the environment in which people are seen as consumer citizens (Slocum 2004; Johnson 2008; Jones et al 2011; Whitehead et al 2011) whose individual behaviour and especially their consumption can be changed by the use of social marketing (Kotler & Zaltman 1971; Peattie & Peattie 2009) and nudging (Thaler & Sunstein 2008; Sunstein & Thaler 2003). These individualistic behavioural approaches are currently the dominant way of engaging with environmental issues. There is support for such an approach, both on a philosophical level (Camerer et al 2003; Sunstein & Thaler 2003; Mills 2013) and also at an empirical level as such an individualistic behavioural approach has been shown to be effective (Goldstein et al 2008; Ayres et al 2012; Ferraro & Price 2013; Chang et al 2016). But this behavioural approach has also extensively been criticised as having a too narrow focus on individual behaviour and failing to see and address the underlying societal wide problems (Shove 2010; Corner & Randall 2011; Barr et al 2011; Barr & Prillwitz 2014; Seyfang 2005; Barnett 2010; Johnson 2008; Goodwin 2012; Moloney & Strengers 2014; Mols et al 2015).

There is also a third and more community focused approach that tries to address environmental problems in a local setting. This is best known in form of the 'Transition Town' movement but also includes renewable energy communities and local currencies. This movement has been described as 'eco-localism' (Curtis 2003; North 2010) and as a re-localisation movement (Bailey et al 2010). The aim of this approach is to reduce the environmental impact by supporting the local economy and local sustainability initiatives and thereby creating low carbon communities. This movement is said to be less focused on politics and is more consensus driven (Bailey et al 2010; Barr & Devine-Wright 2012; Neal 2013) and can attract people who are less likely to be involved in other forms of environmental activism (Aiken 2012). Notions of community, trust and the local play an important role in such initiatives although they remain difficult to pin down (Walker & Devine-Wright 2008; Walker et al 2010; Aiken 2015). The local focus has been a motivator for some to get involved in the transition movement although the ways in which people become involved in such initiatives is diverse and deeply contextual (Barr & Pollard 2017).

1.2.2: Polarisation and inaction

These three ways of addressing environmental issues are currently being used in society in order to reduce the negative impact that human activities have on the planet. So, in one sense environmental issues are nowadays mostly depoliticised as there is a strong focus on personal behaviour rather than direct political engagement but environmental problems also remain highly politicised issues at the same time. Whether climate change is really caused by humans, whether international climate agreements are needed and whether older vehicles with diesel engines should be banned from city centres are issues that strongly divide opinions along ideological lines throughout North America and Europe, especially in the context of climate change (Unsworth & Fielding 2014; McCright et al 2016; Clements 2012b; Clements 2014; Carter 2014; Painter & Gavin 2016). A study even found that in the context of energy conservation nudging, an approach that is supposed to be more apolitical and focused on the individual, is less effective with conservatives than with their liberal counterparts (Costa & Kahn 2013). Beyond the political divide there remains a lot of indifference in large parts of society towards environmental problems. Environmental problems continue to be a low priority for many, even if individuals acknowledge a problem like anthropogenic climate change they are still very hesitant to behave in a more environmentally friendly way and adjust their lifestyle. Finding solutions to this inaction is difficult and has preoccupied many academics (Gifford 2011; Kollmuss & Agyeman 2002; Bamberg 2003; Markowitz & Shariff 2012; Steg & Vlek 2009; Amel et al 2017; Hall et al 2018). It is in this context that academics, media and activists alike have responded very positively to the concern that faith leaders have expressed about environment problems.

1.3: Praise and expectation

1.3.1: Praising the potential of religion

In the last few years there has been a surge in media outlets, academics and activists who portray religion and more specifically religious institutions as very important or even vital participants in addressing climatic and environmental problems. This has especially happened since the launch of Pope Francis' encyclical 'Laudato Si. From newspapers like The Guardian and The New York Times to the editorial boards of renowned academic journals like Science and Nature, they all seem to have high expectations about the way in which organised religion could help addressing environmental problems and especially climate change (see for example The Guardian Editorial 2015; Editorial Board New York Times 2015; Editorial Nature 2015; McNutt 2014). For example at the start of her editorial in Science, McNutt (2014) writes: *'The war on environmental degradation has a powerful new ally: Pope Francis'* (p1429) and the journal Nature is very

hopeful about the impact that the words of Pope Francis might have: '*Given the Pope's moral authority and sky-rocketing popularity — not just among Catholics — his words might travel farther than sober scientific reports by bodies such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)'* (Editorial Nature 2015, p391). In a similar way The Guardian says in an editorial that '*All of the organised world religions now have a strong environmental consciousness'* (The Guardian Editorial 2016). Another clear example of the high expectations about religious involvement is a report by the Environmental Agency that asked 25 experts to list 'the 50 things that will save the planet'. On the list 'faith groups' came in as second highest, leaving behind for example reducing waste and solar energy and thereby showing the high expectations that these experts had about the role of faith groups (Environmental Agency 2007). The tone in these analyses is often one of optimism and hope, a hope that the words of the Pope (only the Pope is explicitly mentioned) will draw many people towards addressing environmental problems and that the environmental problems have finally made it to the spotlight. '*The Catholic Church has a superb means of spreading the word every Sunday'* as the Nature editorial (2015 p391) puts it. Similarly, Brulle & Antonio argue that 'c*oming from such a prominent public figure, it makes this message impossible for political elites to ignore* (p900). Writing in Science, Dasgupta & Ramanathan (2014) express the hope that religious involvement may cause: *'a massive mobilization of public opinion by the Vatican and other religions for collective action to safeguard the well-being of both humanity and the environment'* (p1457). In a similar fashion, academic theologians have started to argue that 'global religion is greening' (Chaplin 2016) or that 'religions are entering their ecological phase' (Tucker 2003). As such, media, academics and activists all seem to think that a potentially very powerful ally can be found in organised religion and that collaboration with faith-based actors is necessary.

1.3.2: Beyond praise and expectation

However, this enthusiasm might also be a bit premature. Firstly, because as already mentioned earlier environmental issues are deeply polarised issues that divide people and there are some who question to which extent religion can overcome such divisions (see for example Li et al 2016). Related to this is the problem that for many churches and faith-based organisations environmental issues are a novel problem with which they have little experience and that therefore churches and other faith-based organisations might have to do a lot of catching up rather than leading from the front (this will be discussed more in-depth in the next chapter but see for example Douglas 2009; Delashmutt 2011; Kohrsen 2015).These problems are caused by another overarching problem, namely that despite all the interest there is very little known about how faith-based groups, individual believers or churches engage with environmental issues (Taylor 2011; Haluza-Delay 2014; Veldman et al 2012). Academics, media and activists might be

very enthusiastic about Pope Francis but whether this enthusiasm is shared by the more than 1 billion Catholics across the world is mostly unknown. It is also unknown how Christians across the many denominations perceive the environment (both practically and theologically) or what the experiences of the Christians who have taken on the call for action by their faith leaders are. It is also unknown how much resistance these environmentally concerned Christians face from other Christians and the rest of society in the context of the ongoing polarisation surrounding environmental issues. However, there are quite a few scholars who are rather sceptical about the enthusiasm that is displayed by media, environmental activists and some academics (Taylor et al 2016b). This rather sceptical view does also include myself as I have written a book chapter (peer reviewed) in which I outline three important reasons to be sceptical about the ability of churches and faith-based organisations to make a substantial impact with regards to addressing environmental problems (see Harmannij 2019). Taylor et al (2016b) summarise these concerns by noting that:

Notwithstanding the increasing number of statements issued by religious institutions, leaders, and activist laypeople, there has not been a groundswell of politically influential religious environmentalism.

(p349)

However, Taylor et al (2016b) also add that '*More study is needed to better understand why'* (p349). This is seeking to better understand how Christians relate and engage with the environment is precisely one of the two major goals of this thesis. This thesis seeks to go beyond the admiration for the calls for action by faith leaders and seeks to understand how churchgoers relate their Christian faith to the environment and how they are practically involved with the environmental issues.

Secondly, it is very clear that collaboration on environmental issues will require that both religious people and non-religious people to be open and self-reflectively and willing to speak with the other and not merely about each other as Habermas (2010a, p16) puts it. But the extent to which secular environmental activists are willing to collaborate with religious individuals and vice versa is not well known. Organisations like WWF, Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace have all responded very positively to the environmental concerns of Pope Francis and seemed the willing to collaborate with environmentally concerned Catholics. For example, in a press release Greenpeace wrote: "*His Holiness Pope Francis' words today are a rallying call for everyone to set aside partisan politics, and focus on what unites us, through open dialogue*." (Greenpeace 2015) But the difficult bit is of course to go beyond these great sounding words and actually starting to unite as people of

different faiths and none and work together on shared concerns about the environment.

One reason why this might prove to be difficult is because despite the welcoming attitude towards religious ideas and religious involvement by media, activists and academics alike religion is often viewed as something outdated, violent, divisive and is often regarded as the natural enemy of reason and science and as such needs to be kept private. Such ideas are in very strong versions popularised by writers like Christopher Hitchens (2007) and Richard Dawkins (2006) but excluding religious ideas from debates and decision-making processes is not just a desire of hard-line atheists. Ideas like the concept of public reason by John Rawls (1997), the principle of secular motivation by Robert Audi (1989) and the translation of religious language into a generally understandable language by Jurgen Habermas (2006) all aim to exclude explicit religious language from influencing decision-making processes. This is because they perceive religious reason as being prone to disintegrate the political community into religious struggle (Habermas 2006 p12) or civil strife (Audi 1989, p277) and because religion is perceived as a threat to the neutrality of the government and because religious reason is perceived to be inaccessible to those who don't share the same religious background (Habermas 2006 p12)**.** Audi (2000) lists no less than seven tendencies within religion that can harm democracy (p282-284). However, getting involved in environmental issues is inherently political and as such a desire to exclude explicit religious ideas from politics can seriously hamper any attempt to incorporate faith-based ideas into addressing environmental problems. Cloke & Beaumont (2012) have used parts of Habermas' ideas about postsecularity to argue that religious and non-religious groups or individuals can work together on issues that both groups are interested in and concerned about. Such postsecular collaborations have been shown to be active in areas like homelessness and drugs rehabilitation whereby faith-based organisations have opened themselves for others from different or no faiths and have used faith-based ethics to not only inspire themselves but also others (see for example Cloke et al 2010; Cloke et al 2013; Williams 2015). But it is also very clear that environmental issues within the polarised political context, the prominent role of scientific and economic arguments with discussions and the novelty of the issue for many churches and churchgoers will present different challenges to religious participants compared with other social issues. As such the second goal of this thesis is to understand how faith-based organisations, individual believers and secular environmental groups can find shared concerns about the environment, how they can collaborate across the religious/secular divide and how they can let faith have a positive impact on the secular environmental movement.

It might seem like questions about the role of religion in making people care for the environment and questions about the appropriate role of religion within society and

especially politics have little to do with each other. But as will become clearer in this thesis they are closely linked. The thesis will show that those who are involved in environmental issues see going outside the 'ecclesiastical bubble' as an important aspect of their faith and that almost all the Christians who are involved with environmental issues are active in secular environmental groups. As such many environmentally concerned Christian find themselves in a situation in which they are trying persuade their fellow believers of the importance that environment concern has to the Christian faith while also having to seek for ways in which they can use their faith in a secular environment which is not always as friendly and interested in their faith-based environmental concerns as the enthusiasm from the earlier mentioned newspapers, activists and academics might suggest. As such, trying to understand how Christians engage with environmental issues also includes trying to understand how Christians and non-Christians are collaborating (or not) on environmental issues and what role faith is allowed to play is such 'postsecular collaborations'.

1.4: Research questions

Originally, this thesis started out as a project that tried to understand how in the area of environmental issues, faith-based groups and secular groups are discovering shared concerns and how these groups can find ways to collaborate and address common concerns like food waste, climate change or air pollution. The intended goal of this thesis was to build on geographical work about postsecularity and faith-based organisations (see for example Cloke & Beaumont 2012 or Beaumont & Baker 2011) and extent this field of enquiry to include environmental issues. However, soon after the initial phase of this project it became apparent that the intersection between postsecularity and environmental issues is very different than with issues like homelessness or foodbanks. Additionally, 'faith and the environment' remains a topic that up to now has not been much explored by social scientists, meaning that it is a field of study where there is a lot of wishful thinking about the potential of religion without much evidence. Therefore, at first this thesis had to take a step back and first understand how faith and the environment are connected in the minds of believers (including how believers combine secular arguments, for example about scientific evidence, with faith-based narratives about the creation) and how they deal with the often deeply political implications of this relationship. Only after understanding how believers relate the environment to their faith and how this faith based environmental concern is turned into action and how faith-based concern interacts with existing secular narratives, could the research proceed into understanding how shared narratives can possibly bring secular and faith-based groups closer together.

In order to do this the thesis will use the following main research question:

How do churchgoers and environmentally concerned Christians engage with the environment, both within the church and the wider society and how do they collaborate with the wider green movement?

This research question is very broad and wide sweeping and therefore, in order be able to research more effectively how Christians engage with the environment and with the wider green movement four sub-research questions were constructed in order to answer the main research question. These sub-research questions are:

1) *How do churchgoers relate and engage with the environment and how is this relationship turned into action?*

2) *How do environmentally concerned Christians relate and engage with the environment and how is this relationship turned into action? And in what ways is this different compared with 'ordinary churchgoers'?*

3) *What difficulties are environmentally concerned Christians experiencing? And how are environmentally concerned Christians finding a shared concern for the environment with their fellow believers?*

4) *How are environmentally concerned believers finding common ground with secular groups and how do they collaborate with each other? And to what extent are secular groups willing to give space to faith-based motivation?*

The first sub-question that this thesis seeks to answer focuses on churchgoers in general and how they perceive the environment:

How do churchgoers relate and engage with the environment and how is this relationship turned into action?

The question above specifically addresses how churchgoers perceive the relationship between their faith and the environment and the ways in which churchgoers are willing to put their faith based environmental concerns into action. The second sub-research question turns its attention to the Christians that are more closely involved in various forms of environmental action:

How do environmentally concerned Christians relate and engage with the environment and how is this relationship turned into action? And in what ways is this different compared with 'ordinary churchgoers'?

The question above focuses on the ways in which churchgoers who are already involved in environmental issues relate their faith with the environment and how they put their faith based environmental concern into action.

Within the context of this thesis churchgoers are the participants from the focus group interviews with churches across Exeter. These people did participate in my research but were not necessarily active in either faith based environmental groups or secular environmental groups. With environmentally concerned Christians this thesis means the supporters and members of the faith-based environmental group 'Green Christian' that participated in the research. These people are Christians who are very committed and engaged with addressing environmental issues and who see caring for the environment as an important biblical commandment.

The third sub-research question focuses on the differences that exist between churchgoers and environmentally concerned Christians and how this leads to tensions and frustrations but also how environmentally concerned Christians try to find shared ground about the environment with other churchgoers, especially how environmentally concerned Christians try to translate scientific, ideological and economic arguments into faith-based arguments that might appeal to churchgoers.

What difficulties are environmentally concerned Christians experiencing? And how are environmentally concerned Christians finding a shared concern for the environment with their fellow believers?

After answering these three questions, the fourth and final sub-research question comes back to the original purpose of this thesis and asks:

How are environmentally concerned believers finding common ground with secular groups and how do they collaborate with each other? And to what extent are secular groups willing to give space to faith-based motivation?

This fourth question seeks to answer how with environmental issues, an area where secular narratives and secular groups are very dominant and faith-based involvement is still relatively sparse, faith-based narratives are given a place and how willing others are to consider and learn from faith-based contributions to debates or action?

This thesis is based on mostly qualitative research with Exeter based churches and with a national Christian environmental group called Green Christian. For the research with churches focus groups were held and with Green Christian in-depth interviews and participant observations were done to gather insights. Additionally, an online survey was distributed and interviews with Devon based secular environmental groups were held. The used methods will be further explained in the methodology chapter.

It is also important to acknowledge that I conduct this research from the perspective of someone who is a Christian himself since childhood and who has also been brought in a 'green household' were most food was bought from an organic shop or grown by my parents in their vegetable garden. This will be explained in more detail in the methodology chapter of this thesis.

1.5: Thesis outline

With the research questions in mind, this thesis will have the following structure:

1.5.1: Chapter 2

The first chapter of this thesis will be a literature review chapter that provides a critical overview of the existing research on the linkages between religion and the environment. The chapter will emphasise the very important role that science, economics and politics play and how often religion seems to play only a very minor role within the polarised discussions that are taking place and that even among environmentally concerned faith leaders and believers the scientific and political ideas and arguments are dominant. As such this chapter will express doubt about the idea that religion has a direct and important influence on environmental attitudes and it also questions the idea that there is 'greening of religion'. But the chapter will also argue that this does however not necessarily mean that religion cannot be a source that encourages care for the environment. But before using religion as a resource for environmental concern, people need to be already convinced that there is a need and urgency to care for creation (for example people need to accept the human role in climate change or see the urgency to address air pollution) and people need to acknowledge that this need to take action is more important than other (economic or political) interests. Otherwise religious concepts like stewardship or creation care are likely to have little effect.

1.5.2: Chapter 3

This chapter will be focus on the writings of Habermas with regards to his concept of postsecularity. It will begin by contrasting the concept of postsecularity with other 'rival' approaches by philosophers like John Rawls, Robert Audi, Michael McConnell and Jeffrey Stout. It will discuss how Habermas has tried to construct a

third way between those who strongly oppose allowing religious ideas to enter political decision making and those who strongly favour leaving religious reason unrestraint. But it will also argue how Habermas' proposal is still firmly rooted in a strong suspicion towards religious reason and that is unable to fully embrace the full potential of religious reason. After that, I will critically discuss how geographers should use Habermas' work to analyse faith-based organisations and faith based environmental groups more especially.

1.5.3: Chapter 4

The third chapter will outline the chosen methods for this thesis and explain why these methods were used. The chapter will also discuss the positionality of the researcher and it will address the ethical aspects of the research that was done for this thesis.

1.5.4: Chapter 5

The fourth chapter of this thesis is the first empirical chapter and will answer the research question: *'How do churchgoers relate and engage with the environment and how is this relationship turned into action?'* It uses findings from the focus groups and focuses on how Exeter based churches relate and engage with the environment. The chapter will argue that the members of these churches show concerns about the environment and display a willingness to undertake action but that they are also struggling to go beyond individual behavioural actions although they have an intention to do so. However, by using examples from the focus the chapter will describe also some possibilities that will enable churches to get more collectively involved with the wider society.

1.5.5: Chapter 6

The fifth chapter of this thesis is the second empirical chapter and it will answer two research questions. Namely, '*How do environmentally concerned Christians relate and engage with the environment and how is this relationship turned into action?* And in what ways is this different compared with 'ordinary churchgoers'? And the second question: *'What difficulties are environmentally concerned Christians experiencing? And how are environmentally concerned Christians finding a shared concern for the environment with their fellow believers'?* The chapter will argue that for environmentally concerned Christians the environment takes up a central place and that loving God's creation is a 'Way of Life' rather than just an activity at church or at home. However, it will also be argued that many environmentally concerned Christians are left disappointed and frustrated by all the inaction, indifference and sometimes even denial among the churchgoers that they encounter. Also, the decline of institutionalised Christianity is limiting the possibilities for environmentally concerned Christians. These problems are very

real and form major obstacles for any attempt to give the environment a more central position within church life. It will be argued that religion itself doesn't make churchgoers 'green' but religion becomes green or brown (anti-environment) through other factors, such as accepting the conclusions of climate scientists, upbringing as a child or political ideology, and then in turn religion will provide a faith-based grounding for these factors and strengthen them. However, by using some examples from participants the chapter will also argue that local engage (moving away from national faith leader led) does have potential to help churchgoers to better understand and engage with the environment.

1.5.6: Chapter 7

This third and final empirical addresses the final research question. Namely, *'How are environmentally concerned Christians finding common ground with secular groups and how do they collaborate with each other? And to what extent are secular groups willing to give space to faith-based motivation*? This chapter will argue that for many environmentally concerned Christians getting involved in environmental issues outside their church or faith-based organisation and that they feel a duty to go out and seek to address environmental problems with others in society. Although they have deep theological convictions about the need to collaborate with others they often join specific secular groups for rather practical and pragmatic reasons and build up collaborations around shared concern about specific issues like fracking, conservation of specific woodlands or air pollution. However, although there is no outright hostility, many people just don't think that religion is relevant or interesting for secular environmental groups. Environmentally concerned Christians feel that they are unable to express their faith openly with these organisations. However, this causes frustrations and discomfort for environmentally concerned Christians as feel that they have to hide or compartmentalise their faith and religion never becomes the *'inspiring energy for all'* as Habermas (2006, p17) visions. The chapter will explain that the cause of this problem is that many secular groups are interested in the institutional aspects of religion (the volunteers, funding, networks and influential position in society) but that there is no attention for the faith-based motivations on which these things are built. The chapter it will also give reasons why religious ideas should be welcomed into secular environmental group. Lastly, this chapter will consider whether there are any Christian ideas that are able to cross the secular/religious divide. It will argue that most Christian ideas remain firmly within the religious sphere but that the important exception is stewardship. The chapter will demonstrate that although the concept of stewardship has been severely criticised it has also a unique ability to cut across not only the secular/religious divide but also the deep ideological divides that still greatly hamper environmental issues.

1.5.7: Chapter 8

The last chapter of this thesis will be conclusion which summarises all the findings of thesis. It will also provide a reflection on the research methods and positionality of the research. It will also make suggestions for future research

Chapter 2:

What does religion contribute to the addressing of environmental issues?

Some parts of this chapter have also heavily modified appeared in:

Harmannij, D (2019) Is It Possible to Give Environmental Issues a More Prominent Role in Church Life?. In: Leal Filho W, Consorte McCrea, A (eds) Sustainability and the Humanities. Cham: Springer
https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-95336-6_6

2.1: Calls for action

The environmental problems that have been described in the introduction have as already mentioned led to many concerned responses, calls for action and also a blossoming field of eco-theology. Statements by the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby, some evangelical Baptists in the USA, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople and especially Pope Francis have been warmly welcomed by scientists, media and activists and have been depicted as a breakthrough moment in the struggle against environmental problems by liberal/left wing news outlets such as the Guardian, New York Times and the Washington Post. But also new outlets such as CNN and Time magazine (Schleifer 2014; Simons 2012; Guardian Editorial 2015; CNN 2008; van Biema 2008; Harvey 2015). Within academia there is as already said in the introduction also a growing chorus of scholars who see religion as a potential solution for numerous environmental issues (see for example Sagan 1990; Hall et al 2009; Kolmes & Butkus 2009; McLeod & Palmer 2015). However, for a long time and to a certain extent up this day there are also many scholars who have argued that rather than the solution, religion and more specifically the Christian faith is an underlying driver of environmental degradation or at least has a negative influence on concern and attitudes towards the environment. Many scholars see religious institutions as actors promoting teachings that have a negative impact on environmental concerns or whose members have little interest in the environment or sometimes even openly oppose climate science or environmental regulation (see for example White 1967; Toynbee 1972; Morris et al 2015; Muñoz-García 2014; Zaleha & Szasz 2014). However, the depiction of religion being either being bad or good is also very black and white and the two options contradict each other rather strongly and expose the lack of existing research. As such, it is important for social scientists to move beyond this dichotomy and to start to study how faith and the environment interact with each other and how this relationship is lived out beyond the well-known calls for action and symbolic handshakes by faith leaders.

2.2: Outline Chapter

This chapter will analyse the role that religion plays in relation to environmental issues and how religious arguments are being used in the polarised discussions that have been dominated by science, politics and economics. It will start by outlining the most important ways through which Christians relate their faith with the environment. After that this chapter will discuss and criticise the ways in which many scholars have sought to praise the potential of religion in relationship to environmental problems. The chapter will go on to explain that faith-based arguments only play a marginal role and that even among environmentally concerned faith leaders and believers the scientific and political ideas and arguments are dominant. Many debates and ideas about environmental issues in church life are deeply polarised and very secular, just like in the rest of society.

After the chapter will discuss the wealth of quantitative studies that have tried to understand how religion influences things like environmental attitudes, willingness to bring sacrifices for a better environment and how religion influences the acceptance of climate science. It will argue that most studies found negative relationships or no relationships between religion and caring for the environment and very few studies found direct positive relationships. Qualitative studies also don't depict the picture that many media, activists and academics are hoping for. These qualitative studies depict churches and faith-based organisations as struggling to go beyond making statements and as failing to make any sort of lasting impact in debates and discussions about the environment. As such this chapter will express doubt about the idea that religion has a direct and important influence on environmental attitudes and it also questions the idea that there is 'greening of religion'. The chapter will also argue that there is little empirical evidence to back up the rather sweeping claim of the 'greening of religion'. This does however not mean that religion cannot be a source that encourages care for the environment. But before using religion as a resource for environmental concern, people need to be already convinced that there is a need and urgency to care for creation (for example people need to accept the human role in climate change or see the urgency to address air pollution) and people need to acknowledge that this need to take action is more important than other (economic or political) interests. Otherwise religious concepts like stewardship or creation care will have little effect. This idea will be further developed in the empirical chapters.

2.3: Christian approaches to the environment

There is an incredible wealth of theological publications that seek to propose a faith-based manner to interact with the environment. Therefore, it is necessary to begin the first literature chapter with an outline the most common Christian theological approaches to the environment. This to give the reader a sense of the spectrum of approaches that might be encountered in this thesis and in order to briefly explain what the most common approaches entail. I exclude negative views towards the environment from this overview, not just because this thesis doesn't focus on faith-based scepticism but also due to absence of theological rationale in their rejection (explained later in the chapter). The scheme on the next page attempts to briefly outline the different approaches towards the environment. The scheme is based on the analysis of various publications, statements by faith leaders and studies by academics were incorporated into the scheme (see appendix 1 for a complete list of all the used literature and other sources). It is important to note that the scheme is an outline of theological approaches and is not based on empirical study nor is the outlined approaches used as blue print for the selection of participants for the research. The scheme aims to provide the reader with an overview of the different approaches towards the environment that exist

among different denominations (or more precisely the approaches that influential figures within denominations have taken) and which are also likely to be present in some form among the participants who took part in the research that informed this thesis.

Theological Approaches to the Environment

Name		Short Description	Important Figures	Sources for their view	Cause of Environmental problems
Eco Justice	Mainstream & Liberal Protestant	Churches should in engage in structural change. Environmental issues are about social justice	Archbishop of Canterbury	Anglican/ Methodist Theology Liberation Theology	Inequality and Injustice around the world
Stewardship	Evangelical (including Pentecostal)	Humans stand above nature but have the responsibility to 'care for creation'	Sir John Houghton/ John Stott	Evangelical/ Calvinist Theology	Sins and Disobedience to God
Nature as a Sacrament Priests of Creation	Eastern Orthodox	Humans, the rest of creation and God are tied into one relationship	Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I	Orthodox Theology	*Man's egocentrism, an expression of his self-willed alienation from God* (Chryssavgis 2007)
Patristic/ Medieval tradition	Roman Catholic & Eastern Orthodox	See the entire world as members of a by God created sacred family: *Be praised, my Lord, for Sister Earth, our Mother, who nourishes us and sustains us* (Francis of Assisi)	St. Francis of Assisi	Early Church Fathers & Medieval Theologians	Early theologians do not write with environmental problems in mind but they describe the relation with nature. Today, their ideas are used to describe how people should interact with the environment
Roman Catholic Eco Justice & Stewardship	Roman Catholic	Humans stand above nature but are also urged to make 'radical' changes and address injustice	Pope Benedict XVI; Pope John Paul II; Pope Francis	Catholic Social Teachings	*Ultimately: humanity's lack of peace with God.* (Pope John Paul II)This leads to environmental degradation and injustice
Eco-Spirituality	Liberal/New Age/New Paganism Agnostic	Humans are part of a spiritual Nature and no more important than the rest of nature	Thomas Berry	Deep Ecology	Current approaches to the Environment are too Anthropocentric

Stewardship is a theological approach towards the environment that most commonly associated with Evangelical Christianity and which is especially founded upon the first chapters of Genesis[1]. A more negative term for the stewardship approach is the dominion approach. Commonly, stewardship is seen as a biblical mandate that makes humans superior carers and managers of earth. The biblical foundation for this view is most famously found in Genesis 1.28-30 where God tells Adam and Eve: "*Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature*

[1] It needs to be added that stewardship is also used within Islamic eco-theology. Within Islamic eco-theology a steward who cares for the earth is called 'khalifah' (Gilliat-Ray & Bryant 2011, p288; Hope & Young 1994). (See also Kula 2001; Haq 2001;)

that moves on the ground.' Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.[2]. In a very similar fashion Genesis 9: 1-3 depict how God tells Noah and his sons to: "*Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything*.' However, stewardship is more than merely a divine permission to extract resources and consume as you wish. There is also an important care aspect within the concept of stewardship. Genesis 2:15 tells how *'The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it'*. As such for many believers' stewardship is not just about using the environment for their own benefit but it also entails caring and protecting the environment against excessive use. For them environmental problems like climate change or air pollution is rooted in a failure to protect God's creation against human greed and sinful desires that lead to overexploitation.

Catholics share the idea of stewardship and as such they also share the idea that humans are placed above the rest (something Pope Francis, Benedict XVI and John Paul II all emphasise, see: John Paul II 2002; Francis 2015; Koenig-Bricker 2009; Benedict XVI 2009). According to John Paul II we are to be '*stewards called to collaborate with God in watching over creation in holiness and wisdom'* (John Paul II 2002). However, this stewardship view is extended by applying the Catholic Social Teachings and an explicit urge for radical change in lifestyles and a commitment to address injustice and environmental problems that are especially affecting the poor (again all recent popes stress this). The Orthodox approach is very similar to the Catholic approach[3] and it also puts humans at the centre and sees humans as 'in Gods own image' (Genesis 1:26 & 27) and Orthodox theology agrees on the fact that God has given humans stewardship over the earth but for them this does not make humans in their view disconnected or far above the rest. For the Orthodox Church all life is a sacrament and *'the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it'* (Psalm 24:1). Humans are still very dependent on nature and part of nature (Adam was made from dust according to Genesis 2:7). As such humans and creation are living in a delicate balance and rather than describing believers as stewards, believers are described as the 'priests of creation' in the Orthodox literature (Chryssavgis 2007**;** Wirzba 2011) and

[2] All bible verses are taken from the New International Version (NIV)

[3] Several statements by popes about the environment have been co-written with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew

this implies much more intimacy and closeness than just exercising stewardship. The Patristic and medieval tradition is closely related to Catholic and Orthodox tradition and seeks to revive the ideas about creation and the relationship between 'man and nature' by church fathers and medieval theologians. These patristic and medieval writings are often seen as favouring less hierarchy and a much more intimate connection between humans and the rest of creation and rather than talking about stewards these writing describes the relation as one between sisters and brothers (St Francis of Assisi) or as God, humans and creation being tied up into one relationship or family. Although these medieval writings do not address directly current environmental problems they do offer a framework on how to interact and value creation. As such theologians have started to explore the value of these writings and how they can help to better value nature beyond merely stewardship. In this context the writings of St Francis of Assisi are very popular but also the writing of St Augustine, St Maximus the Confessor and Thomas Aquinas have been used (see for example Schaefer 2004; Schaefer 2009; Bordeianu 2009; Warner 2011; McLaughlin 2012). Mainstream and Liberal Protestants also see themselves as stewards of the earth but embed this in the existing focus on social justice within these churches. They emphasise the human tragedies that are associated with environmental problems and see addressing environmental problems as an extension to loving your neighbour. '*Reducing the causes of climate change is essential to the life of faith. It is a way to love our neighbor and to steward the gift of creation'* as Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby writes in the *New York Times* (Welby 2017). In a similar fashion, Christian Aid, a development charity that works with various Methodist and Anglican groups, writes in a pamphlet about climate change that '*Climate change is a life or death issue. Not a niche concern, but an issue of justice. People's lives are at stake'* (Christian Aid 2015). As such many mainline and more liberal churches see environmental issues as an extension of their calling to bring justice and help those in need.

All the approaches outlined above put, albeit to different degrees, put humans central to their approach and elevate them above the rest of creation. Although the concerns and willingness to help address environmental problems have been very well received by both academics and environmental activists the strong anthropocentric focus of Christian theology has also been the focus of criticism and some theologians have sought to get rid of the anthropogenic outlook all together and have proposed what Matthew Fox calls 'creation-centered spirituality' (Fox 1988). This eco-spirituality approach doesn't want the dualism between humans and nature as is present in the other approaches and instead argues that humans are part of a spiritual nature in which they are no more important than other parts of the creation. It draws strongly on ideas from deep ecology and is not restricted to Christian theology put also uses ideas from other world religions, native religions, evolutionary thinking, neo-paganism and New Age. As such it does not only cater Christians but also welcomes others from other faiths or no faith. Prominent

members of this approach are Thomas Berry and Matthew Fox and also James Lovelock' Gaia hypothesis could be seen as part of this eco-spiritual approach (see Berry 1988; Fox 1988; Fox 2006; Lovelock & Margilus 1974). But it does need to be added that because eco-spirituality rejects the human centeredness of Christianity and blends Christian beliefs with other beliefs, it does run into opposition from church leaders[4] and for most Christians the radical departure of eco-spirituality away from the core tenets of Christianity is likely be a bridge too far. As such these ideas are more likely to be confined to liberal Christians.

2.4: Potential for religion in environmental issues

The following section will discuss why so many academics have been so enthusiastic about the idea of giving more space to faith-based ideas and practices within the context of addressing environmental problems.

The blossoming of eco-theology and the seemingly growing interest in the environment from faith-based angles has taken the interest of many academics and they have voiced their support for giving more space to religious ideas and teachings when addressing environmental problems. This support is often put forward in articles in academic journals. Although, I never conducted a structured search on Google Scholar, WorldCat or Scopus I quickly found over 80 journal articles without any problem. The authors of these articles have sometimes a theology or religious studies background but often they have a science background. Many of these articles are published in well-known journals like *Science* (Awoyemi et al 2012; Dasgupta & Ramanathan 2014) and *Nature* (Hall et al 2009; Chuvieco et al 2016a) and in journals such as *Conservation Biology* (Van Dyke 2005) and *Conservation Letters* (Bhagwat et al 2011). The articles also appeared in *American Journal of Physics* (Sagan 1990)*, Coastal Management* (Mcleod & Palmer 2015)*, Climatic Change* (Donner 2007) and *Harvard Law & Policy Review* (Rolston III 2010). Especially, conservation biologists seem to be very keen on a role for religion as within third world countries incorporating local religious practices into conservation initiatives seems a highly effective strategy (see for example Hongmao et al 2002; Bhagwat & Rutte 2006; Dudley et al 2009; Yaofeng et al 2009; Frascaroli 2013; Brandt et al 2013; Gupta et al 2015; Shen et al 2016; Li et al 2014).

For many writers the most important reason why religious institutions should be included is because of their sheer size and influence. When the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) announced its collaboration with the Alliance of

[4] Matthew Fox used to be a Catholic but was expulsed from the Dominican Order and he had many disagreements with Pope Benedict XVI/Joseph Ratzinger before leaving the Roman Catholic Church all together.

Religions for Conservation (ARC) it gave a number of practical reasons for the collaboration.

- Religions are major landowners (7% of the land on earth is owned by religious groups).
- Religions are the largest investing group in the world.
- Religions are the largest groups in civil society.
- Religions are major providers of education and welfare.
- Religions have vast (media) networks
- Religions have an astonishing outreach.
- Religious leaders are much more trusted than governments or military leaders.
- Each religion has teachings on caring for the environment which they are seeking to implement in practical projects.

Website ARC (2007)

These arguments emphasise that religion is too big and too important in society to be left out from any attempt to address environmental issues. Religion is something that cannot be ignored and left out by governments, NGO's, charities or researchers. Given the fact that almost 85% of the world population is affiliated with one of the major world religions according to Pew Research Center (2012), especially in regions that being hit hard by environmental problems it is important to include religious groups into the addressing of environmental problems (Posas 2007; Haluza-DeLay 2014; Bhagwat & Palmer 2009; Bhagwat et al 2011; Mikusinski et al 2014; Tucker & Grim 2016). Related to this argument is the often-heard statement that religious institutions such as the Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church or the Church of England have significant economic and political influences which they can use during national or international negotiations about environmental policies or by the local implementation of these policies (Votrin 2005; Posas 2007; Veldman et al 2012). Also, religious institutions run many schools and churches which can be excellent ways to 'spread the message' (Tucker & Grim 2016). According to Gardner (2002) are the benefits of religions that they have moral authority, have many followers, often possess strong financial and institutional assets and Gardner (2002) regards religions as being strong generators of social capital. Also Reder (2012) argues that religions contain much social capital. But these aspects might become less prominent if institutionalised Christianity continues to decline in Europe and North America in the future.

Another argument is that many religions have a long history of addressing all kinds of societal problems. The involvement of religious organisations has often led to radical changes in personal behaviour and opinions towards for example civil rights or slavery (Tucker & Grim 2001; Sagan 1990). This radical change in behaviour is also needed today in order to 'solve' all the existing environmental problems. This

argument is linked with the argument that religions derive their authority from 'higher sources' which makes followers of religions much more likely to make the necessary radical changes (Tucker & Grim 2001).

Another argument is that there is a limit to what science and technology can achieve. Science and technology can explain why climate change is happening and why there is a hole in the ozone layer but they cannot tell how to value it, that up to humans themselves (Rolston III 2006). Science and technology provide a picture about what is going on but humans have to come up with relevant environmental ethics and that is where religions can be an influential player (Rolston III 2006). As such Grim (2013) argues that *'world religions can assist in activating an ecological consciousness'* (p255) while Chevieco et al (2016a) writes that *'religion can help to change people's attitudes and behaviour towards the environment'*. In a similar fashion, Hitzhuser & Tucker (2013) argue that religion is very important in addressing climate change and other environmental problems because: '*the attitudes and beliefs that shape most people's concept of nature are greatly influenced by their religious worldviews and ethical practices'* (Hitzhuser & Tucker 2013 p368, see also Donner 2011).

Wolf & Gjerris (2009) go even further and argue that a religious worldview can give reflections on the fundamental ethical principles as well as giving practical ethical instructions about sustainable lifestyles (Wolf & Gjerris 2009 p119). In all religions nature is praised and celebrated as the perfect work of an almighty and loving God. This implies that the universe and earth and everything that it contains has an intrinsic value. Secular environmentalists usually only manage to appeal our bad conscience by pointing out that the world will end if don't act now according to Wolf & Gjerris (2009 p122). Religions in contrast give a much more positive reason to act. Wolf & Gjerris (2009) also argue that religion is much more than ethics. Ethics assume that we must do good rather than explaining why we must do good. Ethics is restricted to pointing out responsibilities and tasks and because of this limitation it can only motivate according to Wolf & Gjerris (2009) through moral coercion and moral threats.

From all the articles three ways in which religious citizens and religious organisations can contribute to the addressing of climate change and environmental problems become clear. The first idea is that religious and secular environmental groups are barely any different. Both the groups share the idea that there are many environmental problems and that these problems need to be addressed. Religious organisations might have religious motivations but in terms of actual work they do there is no difference. This way of viewing religious environmental organisations gives many opportunities for collaboration.

The second idea is that religious organisations are able to mobilise specific groups of people for environmental causes. This idea claims that religious organisations are highly effective vehicles for mobilising environmental ethics. The idea behind this claim is that religion and engagement based on religious values is woven into the life of billions of people all around the world. This 'interwovenness' of religion gives the opportunity to mobilise them for environmental causes by using religion. If religious organisations are willing to collaborate with other organisations after religious organisations have mobilised religious citizens, then this way of viewing religious participation in environmentalism still provides many opportunities for collaboration between secular and religious organisations.

The third idea is that religion possesses values and ethics that other secular organisations just don't have. The idea is that religion somehow operates on a deeper level than secular arguments and that because of this religion is better suited to convince people about the need to change their lifestyle. According to this view secular environmental ethics are missing something and are unable to convince people. In this view religion is very distinct from other forms of environmentalism and viewing religion in such as separate way and regarding it as ethically superior to others will give problems when it comes to collaboration.

2.5: Criticism of positive role of religion in environmental issues

The following section will start to criticise the positive role that many academics see for religion with regards to addressing environmental problems. The first two ways of talking about religious participation in environmentalism seem reasonable. There is the potential for a lot of overlap on the issue of addressing climate change and environmental problems when both religious and secular citizens see the issue as a problem and it is no more than reasonable that religious groups will be able to attract new people when they start participating on these issues. The last claim that that religious ethics are better that their secular counterparts is very dubious. It claims that current (secular) environmental ethics are failing to convince people that they should act. Because of this failing religious ethics should be used as they are better suited to convince people. This claim is not based on any empirical work and it is not clear whether religious ethics can convince people more easily than secular ones or that religious ethics convince more people of the need for action and secular ethics do. Especially, the claim by Wolf & Gjerris (2009) that *'the secular environmental activists usually only manage to appeal to our bad conscience'* (Wolf & Gjerris 2009 p122) seems very harsh towards all the efforts secular citizens put into protecting the earth. It is true that the Pope has an authority and an influence of which the IPCC only can dream but it should also be stated that the largescale attention of religious organisations is only a fairly recent phenomenon. Callander had already suggested that carbon dioxide could increase the temperatures on earth back in 1938 (Callander 1938) and secular

environmental groups like Greenpeace and WWF were founded in 1960's and 1970's while the first IPCC report came out back in 1990. Most statements from religious organisations about climate change and the environment are from much more recent times. Secular environmental organisations have been active for many years and simply saying that religious ethics and religious organisations are better will wrongly disqualify a long history of environmental involvement. Saying that religious ethics are better does also bring up the question why it took religious leaders so long to call for action if religious ethics are so much better.

Another important drawback of all the claims made by the writers above is that they remain rather philosophical and based on assumptions and lack the research to back up these claims. The claims assume many things about individual believers and especially how religious teachings and individual behaviour interact. But whether religious arguments are really better at convincing people about the urgency of environmental problems is not proven, whether religious people are willing to listen to faith leaders about environmental issues is doubtful and involvement in issues in the past is not a guarantee for any substantial involvement in the future. So, in short many academics see lots of potential but whether this potential can be turned into something more concrete remains vague.

2.6: How to make people care about the environment

2.6.1: Calls for action, religion and science

In the following sections it will be argued that rather than faith-based arguments, it is secular arguments about science, economics and politics that are dominating the discussions around environmental problems and sustainability. Because contributions by faith leaders and theologians are despite the Christian language strongly focused on science, politics and economics. This becomes very clear when reading the contributions of these faith leaders and theologians. In their willingness to address environmental problems the starting point for many religious leaders and theologians is the science behind all the environmental problems. All theological books about faith and the environment start with an overview over scientific evidence very similar to what I have given in the introduction[5]. Some writers are fairly brief and only mention the IPCC while others spent a whole chapter discussing the science, including references to peer reviewed research. This not only true for academic books but also for books that are aimed at the general public. Some writers such Northcott (1996), Northcott (2013), Deane-

[5] In total I borrowed/bought 22 theology books rather randomly chosen about eco-theology from the library of the University of Exeter. (There is a list in the appendix 2). All these books started with a science overview or use science as a basis throughout the whole book. There will probably be eco theology books which do not discuss science but it does give an indication that science is a very important starting point for any theological examination of faith and the environment.

Drummond (2008) and McFague (2008) devote an entire chapter to systematically discussing climate change. But no matter how much time is spend on the science, all writers, without exception, start their introduction or first chapter with an overview or statement about the science. Before any examination or discussion of theology, bible verses or ethics there is always the science. Irrespectively of how old the book is or whether it is academic or for the general audience. Many of the writers' emphasis the consensus about the reality of climate change that exists among scientists and these writers really try to bring home the fact that climate change is real and happening with disastrous consequences. For example theologian Santmire (2000) notes at the start of his book that '*Some popular pundits in the United States daily announce that the idea of a global environmental crisis is a fraud perpetrated by leftists'* (Santmire 2000 p2) but that '*the large majority of scientists who publish their findings in refereed scholarly journals around the world generally share the somber mood of the Rio conference'* (1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development) (Santmire 2000 p2). As such Santmire (2000) does not only use science but also takes up a clear political position. Former Anglican Bishop David Atkinson writes in his book that he found the book Global Warming: the Complete Briefing by climate scientist Sir John Houghton very convincing that he hopes that his own book might convince some of the Christian students who denied climate change that he had met while visiting the USA (Atkinson 2008). In their 'Christian study guide to the environment' Hudson & Hudson (2015) use the system of planetary boundaries as proposed by Rockstrom et al (2009) as a way to show the reader how serious the current situation with the environment is. Every chapter in the book by Hudson & Hudson (2015) discusses a specific environmental problem and presents ways in which Christians can respond. There is even a book (Hayhoe & Haynes 2009), written by an evangelical climate scientist and her husband that in its entirety is devoted to discussing climate change with evangelical Christians. Deane-Drummond (2008) argues that the science *forms the background in which eco- theological is situated, and it is therefore appropriate to name these issues at the outset.* (p1) The science acts as the background on which research on religion and the environment is founded and forms the starting point for theological discussions. In their book Martin-Schramm & Stivers (2003) put their discussion of environmental problems at the start of the first part of their book which is called: 'Foundations for Ethical Reflection'. Martin-Schramm & Stivers (2003) see environmental problems as something that is the basis on which their theological examination rests. Pope Francis makes this even more explicit in his encyclical when he states:

I will begin by briefly reviewing several aspects of the present ecological crisis, with the aim of drawing on the results of the best scientific research available today, letting them touch us deeply and provide a concrete foundation for the ethical and spiritual itinerary that follows.

Francis (2015 p13)

2.6.2: Religion, science, politics, economics and much more

To be persuaded by the Pope and his arguments about how Christians should care for the environment you have to accept the scientific basis below the Pope's arguments first. This is of course also true for the many arguments that are being proposed in other books about faith and the environment. However, it is very clear that not everyone will be accepting the science below the Pope's arguments. Findings by scientists are constantly being contested by the wider society, especially in the areas of evolutionary biology and climate science but also in the areas such as vaccinations and genetically modified crops are findings by scientists often disputed by the wider society. In the case of environmental problems and especially anthropogenic climate change, the question whether people accept the science and are willing to commit themselves to addressing the problems can be influenced by a wide arrange of factors. Research has given many factors that influence how concerned people are about the environment, how willing they are to believe what scientists say and whether they want to take action (for overviews see Gifford & Nilsson 2014 and with a specific focus on climate change see Hornsey et al 2016 and Drews & van den Bergh 2016). These factors include a wide range of things like educational level (Kvaløy et al 2012), personal values (Clark et al 2003; de Groot & Steg 2007), living in an urban area or rural area (Berenguer et al 2005), age (Wiernik et al 2013), materialistic values (Hurst et al 2013), knowledge about the environmental problems in question (Milfont 2012), childhood upbringing (Wells & Lekies 2006; Chawla 2007; Chawla 199; Cheng & Monroe 2012; Rosa et al 2018; Evans et al 2018), ethnic background (Johnson et al 2004), cultural differences (Eom et al 2016), gender (Hunter et al 2004; McCright 2010; McCright & Xiao 2014; Sundström & McCright 2014), personal experiences (Akerlof et al 2012; Myers et al 2013), trust in science (Gauchat 2012; Hmielowski et al 2014), place attachment (Vorkinn & Riese 2001; Scannell & Gifford, 2013**;** Devine-Wright et al 2015), feelings of empathy and compassion for others (Plattheicher et al 2015; Berenguer 2007; Ferguson & Branscombe 2010) , how well the economy is preforming (Scruggs & Benegal 2012; Franzen & Meyer 2010; Kemmelmeier et al 2002) and even the local weather does have an influence (Joireman et al 2010; Zaval et al 2014). One study even suggests the presence of dead indoor plants increases the belief in anthropogenic climate change (Guéguen 2012) while another study found that people living closer to the coast tend to believe in anthropogenic climate change more often (Milfont et al 2013) and a recent study even suggested that whether you use Fahrenheit or Celsius in

communicating climate change can influence how much people are concerned about climate change (Chan 2018). But whether people accept the science and are willing to act is above all determined by political preferences according to much research. This is especially true in the United States but also in the UK and elsewhere in Europe are the partisan divides on environmental issues strong (Dunlap et al 2016; Unsworth & Fielding 2014; McCright & Dunlap 2011; Carter 2014; Carter & Clements 2015; McCright et al 2016; Clements 2012a; Clements 2012b; Clements 2014; Painter & Gavin 2016; Poortinga et al 2011; Palm et al 2017; Krange et al 2018; Farstad 2018). Some research has gone deeper and has argued that pro free market thinking has a very negative influence on whether people believe in anthropogenic climate change and are willing to address it (Heath & Gifford 2006). These political divides about the environment are very deep. American research by Gromet et al (2013) shows that politically conservative people are less willing to buy a more expensive energy efficient light bulb if the bulb is labelled with an environmental message than when the same bulb was not labelled with an environmental message. Political ideology and economic ideology have more influence than all the other things that can potentially influence environmental attitudes according to the American researchers Longo & Baker (2014).

2.6.3: Negative responses and the role of religion, science and political ideology

So, it shouldn't come as a surprise that some responses to the calls for actions by faith leaders were rather negative. As described above, liberal left leaning newspapers such as the Guardian and the New York Times praised the calls for action by Pope Francis and other faith leaders, but the move was heavily criticised in conservative right wing leaning newspapers such as The Sun and the Daily Telegraph. The Sun, in a short editorial, told its readers that Pope Francis *'has no business banging on about climate change*' and continued by saying that '*It's about science and provable facts. That science is disputed, some of it discredited. The Pope's believe in it is irrelevant'* (The Sun Editorial 2015). In a similar fashion Julia Hartley-Brewer (2015) argued in the Daily Telegraph that: *'What the head of an anti-science body like the Catholic Church says about climate change is about as relevant as Kim Kardashian on the eurozone'.* Another Daily Telegraph columnist, who describes himself as a Catholic, writes: *'But when, on the basis of some imperfectly digested science and contentious economics, he tells us that our way of life is doomed, I must sadly say that I don't believe him'* (Moore 2015). Both newspapers made it very clear that the Pope should stay out of climate change as it as a 'science issue' and not a 'religious issue' and that the Pope has interpreted the science wrong. Another example is the Archbishop of Canterbury who on the 16th of August 2016 uploaded a video on his Facebook page about climate change

and how it was threating especially the poor (Archbishop of Canterbury 2016). Accompanying with the video he wrote on his Facebook page:

'Climate change is potentially fatal for the most fragile countries on earth - and the billions of people who live in them. Will you join Christians worldwide next month in praying for creation and taking action to respond to this crisis?'

But instead of talking about prayer points or how Christians could help people who are being affected by climate change there was a big debate taking place about whether climate change was anthropogenic or natural in the comments below the video on Facebook and almost no comments were made about anything else. When 'Laudato Si' was launched by Pope Francis, Anglican Bishop of Chester, Peter Forster, and Labour peer Bernard Donoughue, who are both sceptical about the human role in climate change, wrote their own document to counter Pope Francis. It was called: 'The Papal Encyclical: A Critical Christian Response' and was published by The Global Warming Policy Foundation. In the document they argue that Pope Francis' ideas about reducing the impact of humans on the environment will hurt the poor and that in order to end poverty we need fossil fuels. Strict environmental regulations only create poverty according to them. They also disagree with Pope Francis' criticism about capitalism and consumerism by saying that: '*Markets are the lifeblood of wealth creation, and wealth creation is necessary, if not sufficient, prerequisite to the lasting alleviation of poverty'* (Forster & Donoughue 2015 p3-4). They continue by saying that carbon dioxide is harmless for humans even in much higher concentrations and about the remark by Pope Francis about the consensus among scientists about anthropogenic climate change they state: *'In the past such majority views have often proved to be wrong'* (Forster & Donoughue 2015 p4). They also warn that for costs associated with adaptation to climate change. In the end they say that Pope Francis is somewhat naive and that: '*To us the encyclical is coloured too much by a hankering for a past world, prior to the Industrial Revolution'* (Forster & Donoughue 2015 p2). In the end the writers might call their document a 'Critical Christian Response' but it shows that the disagreement with the Pope is about scientific issues and economic policies, there are a few bible references in the document, theology is no more than a side line.

In their study of climate scepticism among Catholics Vincentnathan et al (2016) find that Catholic sceptics often follow arguments put forward by non-Catholic sceptics. Catholic sceptics reject the view that humans are the cause of climate change and they mix this with conservative political views and similarly to the newspapers mentioned above they argue that Pope Francis should stay out of climate change. After the launch of 'Laudato Si' many conservative Catholic groups

in the USA started to invite climate change sceptics as speakers to their radio or television shows according to Vincentnathan et al (2016). In the Netherlands a Catholic newspaper argued that anthropogenic climate change was widely disputed and that the predictions of the IPCC had been proven by thousands of scientists to be 'hysterical and absurd' and that more and more scientists were abandoning the idea of anthropogenic climate change. According to the writer climate change is trying to replace Christianity as a religion (Peeters 2016). An interesting point is that in the whole article Pope Francis was never mentioned nor was his support for the scientific evidence of anthropogenic climate change mentioned. But sceptical Catholics also bring in some specific Catholic arguments according to Vincentnathan et al (2016). They fear that environmentalism will lead to neopaganism and mother earth worship and that devoting more time to environmental issues will lead to less attention to 'real' Catholic issues such as abortion or same sex marriage.

All the examples above show that for people who oppose the calls for action by faith leaders the focus is not directly aimed at theological underpinnings. Catholic climate sceptics do believe that they need to care about Gods creation (Vincentnathan et al 2016) but creation is just not under such a great threat at the moment as faith leaders believe according to sceptics. Often the critique is a blend of conservative political views and scepticism towards most of the existing scientific research combined with some conservative theological views. But all the examples given above are responses given by influential organisations and figures and there is not much known about in what ways Christians in the pews might disagree with the calls for action by religious leaders or how Christians who disagree with their leaders might put their disagreement into action (or not).

2.7: What role does religion play?

2.7.1: Is there a 'greening of religion'?

The next section will assess the existing literature on whether there is really a move towards 'a greener religion' or a 'Green Christianity' more specifically.

Many of the earlier discussed academic articles are based on events such as the calls for action by faith leaders or the signing of some kind of declaration. These articles are often accompanied by links to news reports about such statements, and sometimes backed up by the use of personal anecdotes to support the idea that there is a real turn around in religious thinking towards the environment. This supposed move towards environmental issues by religious institutions has been described as the 'greening of religion hypothesis' (Taylor 2011). But in their scope these positive articles are often limited to news reports about religious leaders

shaking hands, giving a statement and signing some kind of a pledge to protect the environment. Very little extends beyond words and pledges and very little beyond statements and pledges has been studied by scientists. This has made some researchers, especially Bron Taylor (see Taylor 2011; Taylor 2015; Taylor et al 2016a; Taylor et al 2016b) very sceptical about the extent to which there is a growing willingness among religious people to give more space to the environment. Taylor (2011) argues: *'I am skeptical that the environmental initiatives underway within Christianity are growing significantly, and think the available quantitative data reinforce my perception in this regard'* (Taylor 2011 p258). It has to be noted that Bron Taylor is talking about the American context. The quantitative data he is talking about are studies done by for example the Yale programme on climate communications, Pew research and the Barna Group which shows that especially conservative Christians are less likely to believe in anthropogenic climate change and give less priority to environmental concerns compared to more liberal Christians and non-believers. But that liberal Christians are not more concerned about the environment than the rest of the population (Taylor 2011 p257). According to Bron Taylor it is unlikely that there is a 'greening of religion' taking place and as many believers are no more concerned about environment than the rest of society or even less, the argument that religious environmental ethics are more convincing to people seems not to hold up (Taylor 2011). Taylor is also very sceptical about the various UN organisations that have been praising the potential of religion in addressing environmental issues. According to Taylor (2016) are these praises based on little more than assumptions and the reality is a lot less rosy that some UN organisations might believe.

Discussions about to what extent religion is 'turning green' has helped to create a vast field of sociological and psychological research that analyses to what extent religious beliefs influence environmental attitudes and willingness to address environmental problems. Although the birth of this research field was much earlier, shortly after Lynn White's famous essay about *'The historical roots of our ecologic crisis'* (White 1967) in recent years it has become a large and very interesting field of study. This vast field of research can be seen as an extension to research that examines whether things like gender, age, political ideology and personal experience have an influence on environmental attitudes, willingness to address environmental and the belief in anthropogenic climate change. It has to be noted that many studies are American and that findings are often based on self-reported behaviour, not on empirical work or lab experiments.

2.7.2: Lynn White Thesis

In 1967 Lynn White published his famous article '*The historical roots of our ecologic crisis'* in the journal *Science*. In the short essay that wrote he argued that Christianity is one of the roots of the current environmental crisis. Christianity has a

very anthropocentric outlook and allows humans to dominate the earth with devastating consequences according to White (1967). Humans are superior to the rest of nature according to Christianity and this led to disregard of nature and cleared the way for largescale destruction of nature from the industrial revolution and onwards. Christianity according to White downgrades nature and gives divine permission to exploit and destroy it. This is known as the Lynn White Thesis. This idea of Christianity '*bearing a huge burden of guilt'* as White (1967 p1206) has put it has fuelled a lot of debate among scholars in many different fields of research about the extent to which White is correct in his assessment and how we can create a 'greener' Christianity. For the purpose of this thesis, I will be mostly looking at the studies which examine whether religious beliefs do really influence attitudes towards the environment and how.

2.7.3: The role of religion

Many studies about the relationship between religion, environmental attitudes and the belief in anthropogenic climate change have found support for the 'Lynn White Thesis' in the sense that religion (almost all studies are Christian) often seems to have a negative impact on environmental attitudes in general and specifically belief in anthropogenic climate change (see Taylor et al 2016a for an overview). From the early studies in the 80's up to the latest studies in 2018, give a picture in which being a Christian and especially a more theologically conservative Christian is negatively associated with positive environmental attitudes, willingness to address environmental problems and also negatively associated with belief in anthropogenic climate change. This relationship exists even after accounting for other influences such as political preference or gender. Most of this research focuses on Catholics and mainline or evangelical Protestants, with several studies focusing on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Toney et al 2003; Peterson & Liu 2008; Brehm & Eisenhauer 2006; Olson-Hazboun et al 2017; Barnett et al 2018), one Islamic study (Rice 2006) and two Buddhist studies (Brooks 2009; Brooks 2010) being the exception but non-Christian religions are mostly left unexplored. There is wealth of articles that looks at non-Western religion and which argues that indigenous religions, Buddhism and Neopaganism contain deep pro-environmental tendencies due to their perceived biocentrism as opposed to the anthropocentric outlook of most monotheistic religions but these articles only acknowledge the potential in these religions but do not go beyond describing its perceived biocentrism and the potential that this might give (but see Hedlund-de Witt et al 2014 and Garfield et al 2014 as a notable exceptions). The two published Buddhist studies, both based on research in Bhutan, found that economic factors were better indicators of environmental values than religious factors (Brooks 2009; Brooks 2010). Thereby contradicting the strong potential that some see for Buddhist environmental ethics (see also for Harris 1991; Habito 2007; James 2007 for more on the assumptions about 'eco-Buddism'). But other research on firms in

polluting industries in China did find a positive associated between Buddhism and corporate environmental responsibility (Du et al 2014).

Much research on the relationship between Christianity and environmental attitudes has found a negative relationship, especially among theological conservative Christians. Thereby giving support to the Lynn White thesis[6]. Some studies have linked the negative connection between Christianity and environmental issues with the distrust among evangelicals towards science and international climate treaties (Evans & Feng 2013; Chaudoin et al 2014). Related research also found a negative relationship between Christianity and environmental attitudes through end time theology (Barker & Bearce 2013; Roser-Renouf et al 2016; Curry- Roper 1990). However, there is also lots of research that argues that there is no link between Christian belief and environmental attitudes or believe in climate change after controlling for socio-economic variables or that relationships which were found were only very small and weak (Wolkomir et al 1997a; Wolkomir et al 1997b Hayes & Marangudakis 2000; Hayes & Marangudakis 2001; Nooney et al 2003; Boyd 1999; Martin & Bateman 2014; Newman et al 2016; Ecklund et al 2017; McCright et al 2016b; Clements 2018). Some research also found that the relationship has two sides, both negative and positive. Theological conservative ideas do have a negative impact but there also exists a positive impact which is generated through the sanctification of nature and stewardship, although this positive effect was often very modest (Tarakeshwar et al 2001; Sherkat & Ellison 2007; Killburn 2014; Village 2015; Bulbulia et al 2015; Pepper & Leonard 2016). However, some research did find a positive relationship between Christianity and environmental attitudes although overall religious persons do not have more favourable attitudes towards the environment than non-religious persons (Owen & Videras 2006; Felix & Braunsberger 2016; Peifer et al 2016; Minton et al 2018; Felix et al 2018; Gutsche 2017). Research also found that information from churches about the environment and whether clergy talk about the environment and are actively involved in environmental issues themselves has a profound positive impact on environmental attitudes among Christians (Djupe & Hunt 2011; Hmielowski et al 2015; Holland & Carter 2005). It's important to note that although some European research found a mostly negative relationship between religion and environmental attitudes (Muñoz-García 2014) others found no relationship (Hayes & Marangudakis 2000; Hayes & Marangudakis 2001) or found both negative and positive relationships (Village 2015) and there is even a recent German study that found a positive relationship (Gutsche 2018).

[6] See: Hand & van Liere 1984; Eckberg & Blocker 1989; Guth et al 1993; Woodrum & Hoban 1994; Guth et al 1995; Eckberg & Blocker 1996; Schultz et al 2000; Truelove & Joireman 2009; Kilburn 2014; Clements et al 2014a; Muñoz-García 2014; Smith & Leiserowitz 2014; Arbuckle & Konisky 2015; Cui et al 2015; Leary et al 2016; Morris et al 2015; Olson-Hazboun et al 2017; Schwadel & Johnson 2017; Shao 2017; Irwin & Martinez 2017; Smith et al 2018; Dilmaghani 2018).

Comparative research by Hagavi (2014) on 22 European countries argues that a Catholic culture has a positive effect on environment concern while a Protestant culture has a negative impact. A worldwide study by Chuvieco et al (2016b) found that religion doesn't influence attitudes towards the environment while another worldwide study by Lewis et al (2018) found that within Western countries concern about climate change drops with higher religiosity but that in most other countries in the world higher religiosity meant more concern about climate change.

The publication of the encyclical Laudato si' by Pope Francis also provided scholars with an opportunity to test to what extent religious leaders can influence people' attitudes towards the environment. Some research argues that Pope Francis had a positive influence on the debates about whether anthropogenic climate change was real or not. American research done just after the publication of the encyclical shows that some Catholics became more concerned about climate change after the publication of the encyclical (up from 31% to 44%) and just over one third of the Catholics (35%) say that Pope Francis has influenced their view on climate change (Maibach et al 2015). This is described as the 'Francis effect'. Schuldt et al (2017) found that when exposed to 'Laudato Si' US Republicans perceived climate change more often as a moral issue compared with Republicans who weren't exposed to the encyclical, but it didn't make Republicans feel more personally responsible or willing to address climate change. A study by Li et al (2016) among Catholics showed that whereas encyclical-aware politically liberal Catholics showed increased concern for climate change compared to politically liberal Catholics who were unaware about the encyclical but encyclical-aware politically conservative Catholics showed decreased concern about climate change compared the politically conservative Catholics who were unaware of the encyclical. When confronted with the fact that many conservative politicians disagree with Pope Francis' opinion on climate change, the politically conservative Catholics downplayed Pope Francis credibility on climate change. Similarly, Landrum et al (2017) found that Catholics with a conservative political ideology and familiar with the encyclical downplayed the credibility of the Pope in relation to climate change while politically liberal Catholics who were aware of the encyclical gave Pope Francis additional credibility. A study by the Pew Research Center in 2015 also found that opinions about climate change among American Catholics follow political party lines. Catholics who identify as Republican are likely to downplay the seriousness of climate change and dispute climate science while Catholics who identify as Democrats are likely to see climate change as a serious problem and accept climate science. Myers et al (2017) found that people (not just Catholics) who were already concerned about climate change undertook extra effort to change their behaviour after becoming familiar with the message of Pope Francis but the message had no effect on those less concerned about climate change. So, although some suggest that faith leaders like Pope Francis can

engage individuals who are currently not involved in environmental issues other research argues the Pope' message failed to make an impact among those less likely to be concerned about the environment. According to Landrum & Lull (2017) Pope Francis is 'preaching to the converted'. But it needs to be added that all this research is American and that also the more long term effects of Pope Francis' message or that of Evangelical climate scientists remain unknown.

A study by Arbuckle (2017), although not focusing on the influence of the Pope, shows that religious affiliation has an influence on concerns about climate change among politically liberal persons but also that religious affiliation has no influence on the concern about climate change among politically conservative persons. However, there is one study that found a more positive outcome. The study by Webb & Hayhoe (2017) examines the efforts of a presentation of Evangelical climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe on Evangelical students at an Evangelical college in the USA. This presentation was focused on *'communicating scientific information through the lens of the evangelical tradition'* (Webb & Hayhoe 2017, p275). The study found that many students reported more belief and concern about climate change after the presentation compared with before. As such this study argues that such educational presentations do have positive influence on its listeners.

Many theologians, faith leaders and other scholars strongly believe that within churches there is growing interest in environmental issues. However, apart from anecdotes, there is no research that shows growing interest in environmental issues among Christians over time. There are only a handful of American longitudinal studies that study this claim and they find that over time there is no growth in environmental interest among American Christians, some even report decline (see Konisky 2018; Carlisle & Clark 2017; Clements et al 2014b; Hand & Crowe 2012) but apart from these studies there has been no research on this topic.

So, the positive views that many have about the participation of religious institutions might seem a bit premature as much research suggests that there is a negative relationship or no relationship between religion and environmental attitudes or concern. As such it might seem doubtful whether bringing in religion will have much positive impact. Also whether believers are willing to listen and act on the environmental concerns of their faith leaders is according to some studies closely related to pre-existing political ideology. These studies however all remain quantitative self-reported behavioural studies and do not research actual engagements with the environment by believers. But recently, scholars have also started to conduct empirical studies on how believers engage with environmental

issues. However, also this research shows that the situation isn't as positive as some might hope.

2.8: Empirical work

2.8.1: Lack of empirical studies

The following section will focus on the existing empirical research on religion and environment. The studies described in earlier sections are all studies based on self-reported behaviour surveys. Empirical work about how religious individuals or groups respond to calls of action by their faith leaders or how religious individuals might put their environmental concerns into practical action (or their failure to do so) are mostly lacking. This is quite a big problem as many organisations and individuals have been calling for the involvement of religious organisations and religious individuals but how religions individuals and organisations might best able to help or what the benefits or downsides of religious involvement there are remains unknown. The empirical knowledge about religious involvement in environmental issues is lacking. There is substantial body of literature about on practical religious involvement in environmental issues but this whole body of literature is for a large part devoted to religious involvement in Africa, South- East Asia, India and the Polar region (Watson & Kochore 2012; Davidson 2012; Drew 2012; Johnson 2012; Jacka 2010; Lee & Han 2015; Dominguez et al 2010; Halperin 2016; Kent 2009; Allison 2015). The focus of these studies is often conservation and sometimes climate change. Studies about religious involvement on environmental issues in Europe or North America are very sparse. Although there are studies about evangelicals and their often-sceptical engagement with climate change in the USA (Roberts 2012; McCammack 2007; Zaleha & Szasz 2014; Kearns 1997; Wilkinson 2012; Danielson 2013; Pfeifer et al 2014; Billings & Samson 2012; Veldman 2016; Zaleha & Szasz 2015).

2.8.2: Empirical work on religion and the environment

Research focusing on Catholics (Agliardo 2014) and Presbyterians (Townsend 2014) in the USA and religious institutions in Canada (Lysack 2014) has focused on the responses and statements from Bishops, dioceses and other religious institutions and not on the practical responses. But even at these high levels it is not easy to address climate change and environmental issues. Many Catholic dioceses, bishops and priests have not taken up the issue of climate change in a systematic and vigorous way (Agliardo 2014 p187) although some Catholic universities and religious orders have started to do so (see Sabbaghi & Cavanagh 2015). Presbyterians in the US were more successful due to a group of social ethicists with the denomination that supported the idea of statements about climate change from an early stage and because the reformed theology used by the

Presbyterians was hospitable to ethics of creation care according to Townsend (2014). But these statements had minimal effect ‘on the ground’ according to Townsend (2014). How statements and calls for action exactly impact the local church and environmental organisations and in what ways and how effective the local churches are in addressing environmental issues is mostly unknown.

Existing research on local religious environmentalism does not give the positive picture that many supporters of a role for religion were hoping for. Statements about the environment given by faith leaders and the institutional resources for environmental action often don’t reach the local churches (Delashmutt 2011). In his research on Anglican Churches in Cornwall Delashmutt (2011) found that statements about climate change and environmental problems almost never reach to the local parish. Only a few people were aware of the statements made by the Church of England. Most people instead made their own theological arguments about why Christians should be concerned about climate change and environmental problems. This research shows according to Delashmutt (2011) that

‘The disparity between the beliefs and practices 'on the ground' and the theologies and imperatives 'at the top' surely represent a crucial problem that impinges upon any church's ability to express its newly developed environmental concern’.

Delashmutt (2011 p79)

Douglas (2009) found that in the Australian context clergy often lacked the knowledge needed for environmental awareness and action. ‘Clergy are trained in ‘religion’ and, thus, by default are not trained in ‘science’ according Douglas (2009 p742). There is barely any attention to the environment in the training of clergy. Douglas (2009) also argues that within churches in Australia there is a strong tendency to view the environment as an economic asset without intrinsic value. Churches were also often already busy in other projects on for example homelessness and had declining memberships which causes shortages in volunteers and funding according to Douglas (2009). Churches in Australia also faced the problem that statements by synods or bishops do not necessarily mean that action will be undertaken by local churches. Other Australian research by Lawson & Miller (2011) found that believers who wanted to involve their church, mosque or synagogue in environmental issues faced significant challenges. Climate change was met with denial and making buildings more energy efficient was also controversial as it was seen as being too expensive by members. Congregations sometimes turn out to be not very receptive to such ideas according to Lawson & Miller (2011). Despite this there were still members who were willing to engage in environmental issues. But these members said that secular environmental organisations were very ‘apocalyptic’ and ‘anti-spiritual’ and that

their activities often took place on Sundays during services according to Lawson & Miller (2011). The members still wanted to address environmental issues and collaborate with secular environmental organisations but wanted to use their own theological reasons in this process. Most of the members had never heard of religious environmental organisations and had never collaborated with the government. Nita (2014) found that Christians and Muslims who are active within Transition Towns and Climate movements are being marginalised within the environmental movements because they were seen as 'being too religious to be green' while they also faced disapproval from fellow Christians and fellow Muslims about their environmental involvement, they were seen as 'too green' to be Christian or Muslim. However, the study also found that their respondents did not give up when faced with difficulty. Nita (2014) describes how Christians and Muslims actively try to merge and extend their faith identities with their environmental activism. They used religious language, prayer, objects and rituals, to distinguish themselves from secular activists and to relate faith with environmental issues (Nita 2017). Research on religious involvement in local energy projects in a city in Germany by Kohrsen (2015) found that religious actors only play a very small role. Churches don't give specific attention to environmental issues, were found to be inward oriented, had very limited resources. Religious institutions were more followers rather than leading from the front and were not visible in public debates. As a consequence their role was very small. Swedish research by Lundberg (2017) argues that concerns about the environment within the Church of Sweden do not stem from theology or church wide engagements but rather from personal interests which are brought into the church. Environmentally concerned Christians view the Church of Sweden as not very engaged or interested in the environment. However, some also maintain that there is something unique and promising about faith-based environmental concern. In their conclusion on Scottish churches Bomberg & Hague (2018) maintain that in relation to addressing environmental problems churches have a unique position because they draw:

'…on a set of cultural resources linked specifically to their religious identity. We suggested how these "spiritual resources" – including a desire to protect God's creation (stewardship or creation care), a deep sense of duty and responsibility, and an emphasis on community – provided a potentially powerful "transcendent" narrative and strong imperative of climate justice and action'

(p591)

The authors also conclude that compared with secular environmental group churches are 'less conspicuous and using a gentler rhetorical approach' (Bomberg & Hague 2018, p591) while also arguing that churches have a deep commitment to environmental issues and ability to get people involved remains mostly untapped

and unrecognised by scholars and secular groups according to them. In similar way Kidwell et al (2018) argue that eco-congregations in Scotland are not so much involved in activism or politics but rather in 'incremental, slow change' whose 'outcomes are more difficult to measure quantitatively' (p15). But as Bomberg & Hague (2018) acknowledge it still remains only 'a ***potentially*** powerful transcendent narrative' (p591). The influence of 'green activities' at churches, the impact of Christian environmental teaching on individual behaviour or to what extent believers listen to calls for action is hard to measure, especially when such activities only happened very recently as is the case with most statements on the environmental issues by Christian leaders. However, it is also clear that concerns and interests of faith leaders about the environment don't seem to resonate with the wider church membership and that statements also go often unnoticed. Turning the enthusiasm of a group of environmental activists and faith leaders into church wide interest or action therefore seems difficult. No matter how much 'potential' researchers see in Christian environmental teachings, ethics or actions making any kind of relevant impact will be a lot harder than many of the enthusiastic writings by academics, media or activists might suggest.

2.9: The influence of religion

Non-religious influences seem to be very important in creating environmental concern among faith leaders and theologians. Calls for actions by faith leaders are often followed by debates about scientific evidence and economic and energy policies regarding emissions between supporters and critics of the calls for action, often fuelled by political preferences and economic ideologies while religion never plays more than a small side-line in such debates. It seems like discussions among believers are rather secular. Both sides agree on the fact that God has commanded humans to preserve the planet but how to live out that command and whether humans need to step up their preservation efforts is the focus of much debate. Religion seems to have very little direct influence on environmental attitudes, willingness to address environmental problems or belief in anthropogenic climate change. This is the case in the UK but also the case in the USA science, politics and economics are dominating, also for religious individuals. This is also demonstrated by the fact that almost every participant in my research, interest or concern about the environment never started at church nor did it start the bible, but it often started during studies at university or when their parents took them out to the countryside when they were a child. There is no opposition to faith leaders who say that we need to be good stewards of the earth but when faith leaders say that the scientific evidence suggests that we are not good stewards there will be resistance. But it is also important to say that the bible and the Christian faith can be important motivators for caring about the planet once people have made up their mind and are willing to address environmental problems and Pope Francis or Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby are potentially making the acceptance of

scientific evidence easier for believers by openly accepting scientific evidence, Maibach et al (2015) call this the Francis effect. But how big such an effect might be is mostly unknown but with the ongoing polarisation along political lines on environmental issues the effect is likely be rather small or only short term.

There is of course a well-known link between conservative politics and conservative theology that is not only present in the USA but also in the UK and elsewhere in Europe (Layman 1997; Manza & Brooks 1997; Kotler-Berkowitz 2001; Knutsen 2004; van der Brug et al 2009; Raymond 2011; Clements 2015; Schwadel 2017). As such it might be argued that there is an indirect link between religion and environmental attitudes through political ideology. However, theologically conservative Christians might disregard climate change but their motivation for this rejection is in every case ideological rather than religious and there is no theological reasoning behind their rejection of climate science. Therefore, their political ideology is the direct and important cause of this disregard and not their religious convictions. Although outside the scope of this thesis it is a very interesting question why believers vote the way that they do and scholars have proposed various interesting social and biological explanations as to why people become liberal or conservative (see Kandler et al 2012; Hirsh et al 2010; Graham et al 2009; Smith et al 2012; Oxley et al 2008; Amodio et al 2007; Jost et al 2014; Hibbing et al 2014).

2.10: Conclusion

This chapter has argued that faith and religious institutions are increasingly seen an important way to address environmental problems by academics, media and activists. However, the chapter has also emphasised that there are many more factors that play a role in making people concerned and interested about the environment and that such factors can be very influential, even more so than religion. This was something which became very clear during the discussions surrounding the launch of ‘Laudato Si’. Both quantitative and qualitative research shows that the high expectations among academics, activists and media about the ‘greening of religion’ aren’t becoming reality anytime soon. As such this chapter has expressed doubt about the possibility that religion on its own can spur people into making their lives more sustainable

In the end, what my thesis hopes to add to this particular field of research is presenting the view of environmentally concerned Christians and also that of ‘ordinary churchgoers’ and explore how they relate and engage with the environment and how their Christian faith is involved in that process. Thereby going beyond giving a description of calls for action by faith leaders and also moving away from the analysis of uninterested and sceptical Evangelicals in the

USA and instead trying to understand how Christians are engaging in environmental issues and how they engage their church and the wider secular environmental movement. This thesis wants to present an empirically informed understanding of environmentally concerned Christians and thereby adding to the empirical understanding on the interaction between faith and the environment.

Chapter 3:
Religious and secular reason working together for the environment

3.1: How much room should we give to religion?

As mentioned in the previous chapter, many academics and activists have been positive about the possibility of giving more room to religion and faith-based actors in the context of environment issues. However, giving more room to religious ideas and religious voices will inherently lead to a more visible and more politically engaged form of religion. This allowing of religious reasoning to become more vocal and visible is opposed by many. Religion is perceived by many as something outdated, divisive, full of extremism and as being a threat to democracy, especially to the neutrality of the government. Religious reason is deeply divisive and its only contribution to debates and discussions is disagreement (Ackerman 1989) and acts as little more than a conversation stopper (Rorty 1994) and therefore, religion and its contributions to debates and decision making needs to be translated or transformed into a language which has lost its reliance on religious reasoning and is accessible to everyone. As such religion is often seen as offering little useful to the solving of ongoing problems in society.

This idea of religion as posing a (potential) threat and therefore needing to be restrained has been favoured by many political theorists and philosophers. But this demand for restraint is not merely an academic point of view but shared by many in society. Popular writers such as Richard Dawkins or the late Christopher Hitchens see nothing positive in religion and with the continued presence of Islamic terrorism and the perceived 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington 1996) lurking around the corner, the demand for a strict separation of church and state such as the French system of Laïcité sounds appealing to many. Such demands for exclusion and neutrality are not merely desires and wishes. For example, a recent judgement by the Court of Justice of the European Union allowed companies to ban '*the visible wearing of any political, philosophical or religious sign'* in order to maintain the neutrality of the company (Court of Justice of the European Union, Press Release 2017*[7]). Many academics and citizens prefer religion to be no more than a private source of devotion rather than a source that encourages people to pursue social and political goals that go beyond the private sphere. Therefore it does seems to be likely that for religious citizens wanting to get stuck into environmental issues will not only face difficulties which arise out of the deep polarisation of environmental issues along political lines or from the disinterest towards environmental issues among fellow believers (as described in chapter 1) but deep suspicion about allowing faith based groups to participate in debates and decision making will also prove to be an formidable barrier for environmentally concerned believers. This suspicion then would make it very difficult to establish a visible and influential religious voice about environmental issues.

However, some supporters of restrain and exclusion have also concluded that absolute exclusion of religion is undesirable as well. For example, Rorty no longer believes that religion is merely a 'conversation stopper' but now argues that religion

[7] See also: Judgement of 14 March 2017, Achbita v G4S Secure Solutions NV, C157/15, EU:C:2017:203)

can also provide a foundation for a fruitful engagement with the rest of society (see Rorty 2003) while philosopher Habermas acknowledges that the modern state rests on pre-political foundations and that religion is deeply interwoven with society and must not be merely excluded (Habermas 2008a).

3.2: Outline Chapter

This chapter will discuss the ways in which scholars have tried to address the tensions between the important role that religion plays in the lives of many citizens and the limited role that religion is allowed to fulfil in the wider society, especially politics. The focus will be especially on Habermas and his concept of postsecularity and the ways in which this concept has been applied by human geographers to analyse partnerships between secular and religion organisations. The chapter will at first focus on the works of John Rawls and Robert Audi as they have been very influential for the work of Habermas on religion. After that there will be a discussion about the criticisms that their work has received and how Habermas has tried to incorporate both their arguments and the objections against their ideas in his own work. Following from that there will be a very critical discussion of the attempts of Christian scholars, most notably John Milbank, to replace liberal democracy with an explicitly Christian and more community-oriented framework. After that the chapter will critically discuss how geographers should use Habermas' work as a way to analyse faith-based organisations. Finally, the chapter will specifically discuss how in the context of environmental issues finding common concerns and working across the secular/religious divide will work out very different.

3.3: Opposing views

Debates about the role that religion is allowed to play in society have tended to be rather polarised. On one side there are the so called exclusionists who want to exclude religious reasons and arguments from all political decisions that will involve coercing human behaviour in some way (see for example John Rawls (1997, 2005) and Robert Audi (1989, 2000, 2011[8]). On the other side are so called inclusivists who argue that people should be free to bring in any reason or convictions that they might think are relevant to the political issue in question. This opinion is shared by for example Weithman (1991, 2002,) and Wolterstorff (1997, 2007, 2008). The writings by Habermas (2006, 2008a, 2008b, 2008c 2010a, 2010b, 2013) try to reconcile these seemingly strongly opposed camps by attempting to construct a third way that tries to incorporate the issues and concerns raised by both sides and seeks to take a position somewhere halfway between the opposing opinions.

[8] This desire to separate religious reason is something that goes much further back in history than John Rawls or Robert Audi. Philosophers like John Locke and Thomas Hobbes already advocated a restraint on religion. Another early reason why some favoured the exclusion of religion is because people wanted to separate laws from (religious) morals. Courts and judges needed to base their decisions on laws rather than the prevailing morality (see Hart 1958).

3.4: Rawls and public reason

As already mentioned earlier many scholars favour a restraint on religion and religious ideas when it comes to political decision making. One of best-known supporters of a restraint is John Rawls and his well-known and often used concept of public reason. Rawls' idea forms the basis for many arguments (including those of Habermas) about the extent to which religious reasons can play a role in political advocating and decision making. For Rawls citizens have a 'duty of civility' and this means that citizens *'should be able to explain to one another on those fundamental questions how the principles and policies they advocate and vote for can be supported by the political values of public reason'* (Rawls 2005 p217*[9]). Public reason is the idea that when people are dealing with the core values of the liberal democracy they should not *'rely on disputed approaches such as "elaborate economic theories of general equilibrium, nor appeal to comprehensive religious and philosophical doctrines"* (Rawls 2005 p224-225). For Rawls religious reason is a language that citizens cannot understand unless they share the same belief system and that makes it difficult for non-believers or believers from a different faith to fully comprehend and assess the reasons that are being given as arguments. Laws and policies that will coercive behaviour (like banning old diesel cars from city centres) need to understandable and accessible to all. The view that religious reasons are different and difficult to understand and therefore needing a translation into an argument that is also very important in Habermas' thinking as will become clear later. Thomas Nagel, a former student of John Rawls puts this idea of inaccessibility very clearly:

'The idea is that when we look at certain of our convictions from outside, however justified they may be from within, the appeal to their truth must be seen merely as an appeal to our beliefs, and should be treated as such unless those beliefs can be shown to be justifiable from a more impersonal standpoint. If not, they have to remain, for the purpose of a certain kind of moral argument, features of a personal perspective-to be respected as such but no more than that'.

(Nagel 1987 p230)

The view that religious reasons are 'inaccessible' to others does directly limit the role that religious reason and other moral convictions can play in any exchange of arguments. But at the same time does Rawls wants to limit such restrictions only to situations that are related to 'the constitutional essentials' (Rawls 2005, p214). However, constitutional essentials are interpreted rather broadly as Rawls

[9] *Originally the idea of public reason was put forward in Rawls' book 'Political Liberalism' which was published in 1993 but at the Exeter University library they have the 'expanded edition' of 'Political Liberalism' from 2005 on the shelf. That's why the later revised version of public reason as published in *The University of Chicago Law Review* (1997) seems from an earlier date than the original book.

suggests that when citizens are involved in political advocacy they use follow the principle of public reason (Rawls 2005, p217). Governmental officers, elected politicians and legislators should always use public reason but according to Rawls '*ideally citizens are to think of themselves as if they were legislators'* (Rawls 1997 p769). As such there is little room for anyone who uses religious reason to formulate his political wishes. However, Rawls also saw that this requirement would put citizens whose reasons were not 'public' at a disadvantage.

How is it possible-or is it-for those of faith, as well as the nonreligious (secular), to endorse a constitutional regime even when their comprehensive doctrines may not prosper under it, and indeed may decline?

Rawls (1997 p781)

Therefore, he revised his idea (Rawls 1997) and added what he calls a 'proviso'. This means that religious convictions are allowed as long as a proviso is provided in due course (Rawls 1997 p776). This means that the distinct religious language needs to be replaced with 'proper political reasons' later on (Rawls 1997 p784). But Rawls also argues that: *'the details about how to satisfy this proviso must be worked out in practice and cannot feasibly be governed by a clear family of rules given in advance'* (Rawls 1997 p784). So, finding a suitable proviso will require willingness to talk, listen and come up with a common ground which they both find acceptable. This needs to happen sincerely and not be manipulative according to Rawls (1997 p787). In the search for proviso the input of religious ideas is important:

It is wise, then, for all sides to introduce their comprehensive doctrines, whether religious or secular, so as to open the way for them to explain to one another how their views do indeed support those basic political values.

Rawls (1997, p785)

Rawls is certain that a proviso will be found. Rawls argues that even in conflicting moral truths there are certain things that have an overlap with the basic principles of the liberal democracy. This is what Rawls describes as overlapping consensus (Rawls 1987; Rawls 1989). For Rawls moral truths contain overlap with wider accepted public reasoning which will help believers to find a proviso. Rawls uses the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan to explain this. For Rawls, this parable contains wider political values that non-Christians also agree on. But Rawls does not want the parable of the Good Samaritan as such but argues that the parable contains political values such as helping those in need regardless of religion, nationality or age that are shared with others. Such morals from the parable are very welcome in political conduct according to Rawls. But it remains important for

him that the parable is transformed into wider shared public reasons otherwise non-Christian individuals will not be able to access and understand those morals (Rawls 1997 p786). Unlike Habermas (2008a) Rawls does not see the parable of the Good Samaritan as a pre-political source on which democracy is founded or as a story that can encourage or be useful to non-Christians as well. Rawls rather sees parable of the Good Samaritan as a religious story that displays overlap with democratic values but democracy is certainly not derived or dependent nor is it due to its clear dependence on religious language helpful to secular citizens.

3.5: Robert Audi and adequate secular reason

Another influential philosopher who favours a restraint on religious reason is Robert Audi. He argues that any coercive law or policy should always be based on 'adequate secular reason' (Audi 2011). According to Audi: '*one should not advocate or support any law or public policy that restricts human conduct unless one has, and is willing to offer, adequate secular reason for this advocacy or support'* (Audi 1989 p279). Just like Rawls, also Audi also wants to restrain religious reason but he doesn't want to transform religious reasons into secular or public reason. Religious reasons are still welcome in political conduct according to Audi. People can freely bring in religious reasons if these religious reasons are convincing for them as long as religious people who cite religious reasons are also able support the desired policy or law without the added religious reasons (Audi 1989; Audi 2005). The religious reasons are extra additions next to an already convincing core of secular arguments. Audi does not find it necessary the transform or translate all religious reasons, only a core needs to be secular, the rest can remain religious. However, people must not give secular reasons just for the sake of convincing people, they must also be motivated by these reasons themselves. This is what Audi calls the principle of secular motivation (Audi 1989; Audi 2011). In the end Audi wants a set of secular reasons that can be discussed with everyone in society and in addition people can bring in as many religious convictions and reasons into political conduct as they want. Audi hopes religious citizens will find a 'theo-ethical equilibrium' between their religious and secular convictions (Audi 1997; Audi 2011). This idea of theo-ethical equilibrium entails that if citizens have religious reasons to support a policy, they should according to Audi inquire whether they also have secular reasons to support the same policy and whether they are also motivated by these secular reasons. If citizens find secular reasons and are motivated by these same secular reasons, then they have found 'theo-ethical equilibrium' but if they can't find secular reasons that overlap with their religious reasons then they should not support the policy or law according to Audi. However, finding motivating secular reasons seems to be a task that religious citizens must do themselves.

3.6: Religion and treating everyone equally

The reason why Rawls or Audi want to limit or exclude religious reasons goes deeper than just the idea that religious reasons are different and not

understandable for people who don't share the same religious convictions. The underlying motivation is that every citizen is free and equal and this implies that people who are involved in political conduct should have a common starting point that provides everyone who is involved with the same, equal start in their political conduct. Arguments that assume certain presumptions (such as believing in the authority of the bible) cannot be accessed and understood by everyone as they do not share the belief in biblical truth. In a liberal democracy all citizens are free and equal but when some citizens put forward arguments that are not accessible for people who do not share the underlying assumptions, they are no longer treating their fellow citizens as free and equal according to Rawls (1997, p782-783). By doing this these citizens are not giving the opposing view on the matter equal weight compared to their own; they are not treating the opposing voices as equal to their own voice. As a consequence, citizens see their freedom being reduced by coercive laws and policies that are based on underlying religious assumptions that they don't share.

3.7: Religion as a threat to democracy

There is however one more important reason why many philosophers and political theorists want to exclude or restraint religious reasons. This reason is that religion is perceived to be highly divisive and a threat to democracy. Many scholars who want to restrain religious reasons argue that religion contains characteristics that run against the principles of liberal democracy. Audi lists no less than eight characteristics of religion that clash with the ideas of the liberal democracy (Audi 2000 p282-283). Rawls, Habermas and Audi argue throughout their writings that religions have many undemocratic tendencies within them and often form a source of conflict and instability. Religious reasons only bring disagreement between different citizens and will bring an agreement between opposing opinions not any closer. Religion only brings disagreement and therefore we need to start "*putting the moral ideals that divide us off the conversational agenda of the liberal state*" (Ackerman 1989 p16). When individuals are allowed to base laws and policies on their personal faith without attempting to find reasons that others also can access and understand it might create civil strife according to Audi (1989 p277). Leaving religious reasons without any proper secular 'translation' could lead to a situation in which the political community can disintegrate into religious struggle according to Habermas (2006 p12). Rawls describes the differences between the many comprehensive doctrines (including religion) as being potentially irreconcilable (Rawls 1997 p804).

3.8: Criticising restraint and exclusion

However, the idea of excluding or limiting religious reason from political conduct has also been strongly criticised by many as unachievable, unnecessary, undemocratic and as excluding religious citizens from participating in political decision making. Philosophers and legal scholars like Nicholas Wolterstorff (1997), Jeffrey Stout (2004), Paul Weithman (2002), Michael McConnell (2007) and Kent

Greenawalt (1995) have been very vocal in their opposition to the ideas of public reason and the principle of secular motivation. Much criticism focuses on whether there is something that can be called public and accessible to all. The idea that reasons can be constructed in such a way that they are accessible and understandable for everyone has been dismissed as an extremely idealised picture of how 'the political mind' works and not founded in reality (Wolterstorff 1997 p97) and Rawls has been accused of being too caught up in theorising about an idealised form of reasoning that does not relate to reality (Stout 2004; Wolterstorff 1997). For these scholars political debates should not avoid disagreement about religion or ideology, nobody will be unequal during disagreement as long as we respect and listen carefully to each other during discussions as Stout (2004) puts it. For him Rawls and other supporters of restraint are so obsessed with finding consensus among all the citizens that they forget that within debates and decision making, disagreement is a normal and often good thing. Does it really matter if somebody supports stricter emissions rules based on reading IPCC reports or because he or she beliefs that the earth is Gods sacred creation? The outcome is the same in both the cases. What makes the reason more important than the conclusion? (Wolterstorff 1997, p106). Greenawalt (1995) argues that when someone favours stricter environmental laws based on the views expressed by the Catholic Church it does not force Catholic teachings upon non-Catholics. The focus is on the issue at stake and not on religion. If environmental laws would pass it would not be an endorsement of the Catholic Church and a rejection of the environmental laws would not be a rejection of the Catholic Church. Restraining religion assumes that religious reasons are wrong by default and focuses only on whether an argument is religious or not without looking at the outcome (Wolterstorff 1997). Another argument against restraining religion is that churches and faith-based organisations play a very important role in enabling people to participate in political conduct, especially among the poor and minorities (Weithman 2002). Religious organisations often give disadvantaged people the much-needed opportunities and resources to become politically active. Putting up barriers against religious reason would disproportionately affect them and would prevent lesser off people from participation political decision making. It would prevent a vulnerable group from becoming politically active (Weithman 2002 p48). Or as Cornel West puts it:

Their versions of secular liberalism, intentionally or unintentionally, make it difficult for the Martin Luther King Jr.'s to emerge because of their deep suspicion of religious voices that they see have authoritarian implications and repercussions

West (2010, p416)

Another concern for the critics is that excluding religious reasons will cause religious citizens to put forward arguments which they don't really support or favour policies which don't align with their views (Weithman 1991; Jordan 1997). The real reasons why people support certain policies will remain undisclosed and society

will always remain ignorant about the real reasons that religious individuals have and we will lose the opportunity to learn from, and to critically examine, what they have to say (Stout 2004 p64). Religious reasons also closely reflect the deep feelings about laws and policies among many citizens and restraining religious reasons will prevent these deep feelings from being expressed. For many citizens religion is an integrated part of their social and political life and a restraint will put a huge pressure on religious citizens to find other non-religious reasons:

'People have great difficulty trying to face particular political issues free of the push of their religious or other comprehensive views. It requires an exceptional discipline to do so with any success. It is doubtful whether one should recommend to ordinary people a self-restraint that is so hard to perform'.

Greenawalt (1995 p138)

3.9: Religious reason without restraint

Eventually, restricting the use of religious reasons is a paradox (Wolterstorff 2007; McConnell 2007). Rawls, Audi and all the other supporters of a restraint want a restraint to create a better, more equal political system in which nobody is excluded and everybody starts on the same level but in reality it puts a large burden on the shoulders of religious citizens and greatly limits their options for participating in political conduct.

In reality, therefore, such people are being told that they cannot act in the capacity of citizen, or that if they wish to act in the capacity of citizen they must give up something they value above all else. They are told, in effect, that their religious faith excludes them from public life. It is hard to imagine a more illiberal result, or a more impoverished conception of political community.

McConnell (2007, p173)

All the criticisms against the exclusion of religious reason force these philosophers and legal scholars to abandon the idea that religious reasons need to be changed or left out in order for democracy to proper function. Instead, they argue that there should be no restraint, exclusion or limitation on religious reasons*[10]. Religious reasons should be free to use throughout the whole political process even when the focus is on coercive policies. Stout (2004) argues that: *'All democratic citizens should feel free, in my view, to express whatever premises actually serve as reasons for their claims.'* (2004, p10). While Wolterstorff argues in a very similar

[10] The different philosophers, political theorists and legal scholars do all have slightly different ideas but they all want to abandon the demands for exclusion and restraint on religious reasons as offered by Audi and Rawls. There many others like Eberle (2002), Carter (1993), Perry (2003) and Sandel (2009) who have not been discussed here but they all oppose the restraints on religious reasons as imposed by Audi or Rawls as well.

fashion: *'Let citizens use whatever reasons they find appropriate-including, then, religious reasons.'* (1997, p112).

Of course, the supporters of no restraint or limitation on religious reasons do see that religious reasons can indeed be very undemocratic and disrespectful but so can secular reason. Removing religious reasons because they can give voice to undemocratic values will do more harm than good according to Weithman (2002 p140). But this doesn't mean that religious citizens can just ignore secular reasons and don't have to engage with their secular counterparts. Weithman (2002), Wolterstorff (1997), Greenawalt (1995) and Stout (2004) all strongly emphasis that both secular and religious citizens need to open, respectful and sincerely debating and discussing with each other but in order to do this there is no need to exclude religious reason.

3.10: Habermas and the role of religion

The following sections will explain Habermas' position in these debates and how he attempts to construct a third way out of this deadlock but also how his third way struggles to make a difference.

3.10.1: Habermas and excluding religion

Just as the previously mentioned scholars, also Habermas strongly criticises the idea of a strict restrain on religious reasons and shares many of the concerns that are being put forward by Wolterstorff, Greenawalt, Stout and others. He explicitly mentions both John Rawls and Robert Audi as scholars who want such as strict restrain and who have been heavily criticised for demanding such restraint (Habermas 2006, p6-9). He argues that such a strict restraint is too demanding for many religious people:

'The liberal state must not transform the requisite institutional separation of religion and politics into an undue mental and psychological burden for those of its citizens who follow a faith'.

Habermas (2006 p9)

Habermas agrees with the many critics that a restraint as Rawls or Audi demand is not reasonable and that religious individuals cannot be expected to provide secular reasons to replace their religious reasons and effectively split their religious identity from their public/political identity. Like Wolterstorff or Weithman, Habermas is very clear about the fact that this is unreasonable. But unlike the other critics of Audi and Rawls, Habermas does not proceed to abandon the restrictions that Rawls or Audi place on religious reason. Habermas views a restraint on religious reason as an important aspect of democracy in order to keep the government neutral. Having

no restraint on religious reason will make the government loose its neutrality. According to Habermas, scholars like Wolterstorff, Weithman and Stout violate the principle of the neutral state.

'In so doing, contrary to their own claim to remain in line with the premises of the liberal argument, they violate the principle that the state shall remain neutral in the face of competing world views'.

Habermas (2006 p11)

The principle of the neutral state is very important in the functioning of a liberal democracy for Habermas. According to Habermas (2010a) religious communities cannot turn a deaf ear to this normative requirement (p21). A neutral state needs to have a neutral language which makes the things that are being discussed available for everyone to understand. Habermas argues in a way very similar to that of Robert Audi, Thomas Nagel and John Rawls (who all favour a strict restraint on religious reason) that:

'All enforceable political decisions must be formulated in a language that is equally accessible to all citizens, and it must be possible to justify them in this language as well'. Majority rule turns into repression if the majority deploys religious arguments in the process of political opinion and will formation and refuses to offer those publicly accessible justifications which the losing minority, be it secular or of a different faith, is able to follow and to evaluate in the light of shared standards.

Habermas (2006 p12)

Habermas is afraid that having no restraint on religious reason will allow religious rules to be enforced upon others by a religious majority (Habermas 2006 p11-12). If people who disagree with decisions are forced to obey religious rules, it can lead according to Habermas to the situation in which the political community can disintegrate into religious struggle (Habermas 2006 p12). This fear for a struggle is very similar to fear for strife and instability that is described by Audi and Rawls. And just like all the other supporters of restrain does Habermas view religious reason as a language which cannot be understood by people unless they share the same religious background. During a debate between him and Charles Taylor he states this argument very clearly and in a language that closely resembles the ideas by Thomas Nagel and John Rawls:

'*For any kind of religious reasons, you are appealing to membership in a particular or corresponding religious community because of one thing: namely, only if you are a member and can speak first-person about a religious community you can share a specific kind of experience. To put it bluntly, the most important experience—and*

I'm not ranking it, please—is coming out from participating in cultic practices, in cultic practices in which no Kantian or Utilitarian has to participate in order to make a good Kantian or Utilitarian argument. So it's a kind of experience that is blocked, so to say, or not taken into account, is abstracted from, in these secular spaces of giving and taking reasons'.

Habermas & Taylor (2011, p61)

3.10.2: Translating religious reason

Because religious reasons can be a threat to democracy and inaccessible to people who don't share the same religious experience, Habermas requires religious reason to be translated into a generally accessible language (Habermas 2006 p9). For Habermas there is no room for religious reasons after what he describes as the institutional threshold (Habermas 2006, p9). Habermas is very strict and direct on this point. There are no religious reasons allowed, not even when they are supported by sincere secular reasons as is the case with Audi.

'Every citizen must know and accept that only secular reasons count beyond the institutional threshold that divides the informal public sphere from parliaments, courts, ministries and administrations'.

Habermas (2006 p9)

So according to Habermas before crossing the institutional threshold all religious reason needs to be translated into generally accessible language (Habermas 2006, p9). This translation requirement is very important and should not be taken lightly as governments need to remain neutral towards competing religious truths (Habermas 2010a, p21). For Habermas neutral language is the way to keep the government neutral in the face of opposing views. According to Habermas giving space to untranslated religious reason will lead to a situation in which the political community can disintegrate into religious struggle (Habermas 2006 p12) and it will also lead to a situation in which policies and legal programs will be implemented '*solely on the basis of the specific religious or confessional beliefs of a ruling majority'* (Habermas 2008b, 133). So, from this point of view it seems like Habermas is merely using a different phrase to favour secular reason and remains loyal to all the supporters of the exclusion of religious reason and doesn't seem to do anything with the criticisms that were brought forward earlier. He does acknowledge the difficulty that religious citizens might face when participating in politics but he remains loyal to the principles of public reason. However, the way in which this translation will happen is according to Habermas much more friendly and tolerant towards religious citizens than other approaches and will let religious citizens participate in political decision making despite putting a threshold in place. Habermas argues that the process of translating religious reason into a 'generally

accessible language' will not fall on the shoulders of religious citizens alone. It's a cooperative task (Habermas 2006, p11). The translation process should be a process that involves both secular and religious individuals. It is complementary learning process for both religious and secular citizens (Habermas 2010a p21). In order to share the burden of translating religious reason both religious and secular citizens need to behave in a self-reflective manner towards each other in the political public sphere (Habermas 2006 p20) and religious and secular citizens should speak with other and not merely about one other according to Habermas (2010a, p16). During such conservations:

The point is not to convert others, but to engage in a process of reciprocal learning in which each participant's particular view becomes fused with that of everyone else in an ever more enlarged and shared horizon.

Habermas (2013, p375)

Secular citizens need to leave behind pre-assumptions about religious ideas and be open and willing to help religious citizens to find appropriate translations for their reasons. Secular citizens should not treat religious expressions as simple irrational according to Habermas (2010a p22). Secular citizens are expected to adopt a self-reflective critical stance towards the limits of the enlightenment as Habermas (2008a, p112) argues.

Secular citizens, in their role as citizens, may neither deny that religious worldviews are in principle capable of truth nor question the right of their devout fellow-citizens to couch their contributions to public discussions in religious language.

Habermas (2008a, p113)

But at the same time religious citizens must also acknowledge the neutrality of the state towards religion, the equal freedom of all religious communities and the independence of institutionalised sciences according to Habermas (2010a, p22). Habermas describes these requirements for both religious and secular citizens as a '*momentous step'* (Habermas 2010a, p21). By actively involving not only religious citizens but also secular citizens in this translation process, Habermas seeks to address the mental and psychological burden (Habermas 2008b, p130) that many supporters of restraint seem to impose on religious citizens and therefore wants secular citizens to help to carry the burden that is imposed on religious citizens by the exclusion of religious reason.

3.10.3: Religious reason as important and valuable

Habermas aim is not to simply assimilate religious reason into secular reasons. He acknowledges that the modern state is founded on pre-political foundations

(Habermas 2008a), that '*religious traditions have a special power to articulate moral intuitions*' (Habermas 2006, p10) and that religious reason contains *'an essential connection to the ongoing practices of life'* (Habermas 2010b, p75). Religious reason can add valuable insights to debates which enrich and further discussions and for Habermas religion should be an inspiring energy for all as it contains values and morals that are not present in secular values (Habermas 2006, p17). Acknowledging the value of religious reason and sincerely engaging with the ideas of religious citizens will lead according to Habermas to a shift in the ways in which people are thinking about the relevance and role of religion in modern society. This change in the mind set of people towards the role of religion in society is what Habermas describes as 'postsecular':

I use the expression "post-secular" as a sociological description of a shift in consciousness in largely secularized or "unchurched" societies that by now have come to terms with the continued existence of religious communities, and with the influence of religious voices both in the national public sphere and on the global political stage.

Habermas (2013, p348)

Therefore the goal of the mutual translation by Habermas is a realisation among everyone involved that although the secular is very strong and important that there needs to be a real and sincere engagement with religious citizens and their ideas. Religion is valuable and its ideas should not be lost. This necessity of a sincere engagement with religious citizens and their ideas is the part of Habermas' work which often used in the field of human geography.

3.10.4: Habermas as exclusionary towards religious reason

But at the same time does Habermas continue to view religious reason with a large degree of suspicion. Thresholds beyond which only secular reason is welcome are still necessary and religious reason is depicted as being inaccessible, threating neutrality and potentially harmful to the functioning of democracy. '*Religious reasons are not reducible to 'ethical' worldviews'* according to (Habermas 2010b, p79). These depictions of religious reasons are no different to Audi or Rawls and such depictions have been sharply criticised by for example Stout (2004), Wolterstorff (1997) and Greenawalt (1995). In Habermas' view religious reason always needs to be translated (it's never the turn of secular reasons to be translated) and as a consequence religious reason will never enjoy the same status within Habermas thinking as secular reason. Although acknowledging the important pre-political values that are contained within religious thought and the fact that religious reasoning contains strong impulses towards actions in solidarity (Habermas 2010b, p75) religious reason is still classified by Habermas as threating neutrality and being inaccessible. Secular reasons on the other hand are accessible to all and do not pose a threat to neutrality for Habermas. Very similar

to Rawls, Habermas is convinced that secular reasons are able to articulate the fundamentals of democracy and political conduct without relying on other religious or moral reasoning.

I assume that the constitution of the liberal state can satisfy its need for legitimation in a modest way by drawing on the cognitive resources of a set of arguments that are independent of religious or metaphysical traditions.

Habermas (2008a, p104)

The quote above is completely in line with the ideas of public reason by John Rawls. The idea that certain core concepts are independent is a philosophical assumption which is highly abstract and been criticised as lacking any sense of reality and 'being an idealised picture of the political mind' (Stout 2004 p74; Wolterstorff 1997 p97). But it also shows that although very critical of the ideas by Rawls or Audi, Habermas still shares many of their ideas and assumptions. Habermas is still a believer in public reason and despite his open attitude towards religion his demand for a generally accessible language (Habermas 2006 p9) is largely informed by the exclusionist ideas of Audi and Rawls. The idea that religious reason needs to be translated into generally accessible reason is in the basis little different than the idea that citizens need to use public reason as proposed by John Rawls. Although Habermas may be friendlier towards citizens with religious reasons and he does see the unique value of religious reasoning, he still believes than religious reason is inaccessible and harmful and therefore needs some sort of transformation that makes it harmless and more accessible. In the end all reason must be accountable to everyone and remain neutral and this makes it for Habermas impossible to have religious reason beyond the institutional threshold. The way of making reasons secular might be different but the end result of Habermas' mutual translation task is the replacement of religious reasons with 'neutral' reason and this result is very similar to other 'exclusionist approaches' that Habermas is criticising in his writings. This might also be the reason why the '*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy'* puts Jürgen Habermas together with Robert Audi and Jon Rawls on the list of philosophers and political theorists that have the 'standard view' about politics and religion (Eberle & Terence 2015).

3.10.5: The two faces of Habermas

What the analysis above shows is the two very different faces of Habermas' thought. On one side there is the in human geography well-known side that sees Habermas as a philosopher whose ideas can inspire mutual learning, understanding, tolerance and collaboration between people. Habermas' ideas bring

together people from many different backgrounds and inspires people to find common concerns and desires through which they can collaborate on addressing societal problems like homelessness, racism, mental health issues but also environmental problems (Cloke & Beaumont 2012; Baker & Beaumont 2011; Cloke et al 2014). But on the other side are Habermas' ideas that favour strict exclusion and perceive religion as inaccessible and a threat. For scholars who approach Habermas from this latter side Habermas is a philosopher with a traditional exclusionist outlook whose ideas about threshold and translation fall short of going beyond other exclusionist ideas, especially those of John Rawls. Charles Taylor criticises Habermas for although willing to see the importance and relevance of religious reason there is still a clear line in his thinking that sees secular reason as '*as though it were able to resolve certain moral political issues in a way that can legitimately satisfy any honest, unconfused thinker'* while still viewing religious reason *'as though they will always be dubious, and in the end only convincing to people who have already accepted the dogmas in question'* (Taylor 2011, p53). Also, Wolterstorff (2013) sharply criticises Habermas and his concept of mutual translation for still perceiving religious reason in similar fashion as Rawls or Audi do, namely as inaccessible and a threat to democracy. According to Wolterstorff (2013) does Habermas have a '*distorted picture of religion and of the reasons that religious people offer*' (p108). For both Taylor and Wolterstorff, Habermas doesn't take enough distance from the negative assumptions and underpinnings about religion that are present in the work of Rawls or Audi[11]. Approaching Habermas from this angle reveals his ideas as still being (somewhat) exclusive in nature towards religious reason rather than open and tolerant. Scholars that view Habermas from an exclusionist perspective do see and appreciate the attempts by Habermas to include religious citizens and their religious ideas in politics but they still see Habermas' perspective as pushing strongly towards exclusion through the means of translation and as such still being firmly founded on the ideas of especially John Rawls. They do applaud Habermas for his open mind towards religion, but they also see him as being tied up in the idea that religion has to be excluded.

3.11: Replacing liberal democracy

3.11.1: Criticism beyond religion and politics

Up to this point this chapter has dealt with scholars who either want to impose restraints on religious reasons while still seeking to salvage religious ideas for political decision making and those who oppose any kind of restraint. But before going further by analysing how human geograpghy has used the ideas of

[11] (See also Yates 2007; Frega 2012; Neal 2014; Cooke 2006 for other critiques on Habermas mutual translation proposal).

Habermas it important to emphasise that some Christian scholars go much further in their criticism than Stout, Wolterstorff or McConnell do. Because although Rawls, Habermas, Wolterstorff and Stout might disagree on the appropriate role of religion within political decision making, they are all deeply committed to the idea of liberal democracy. However, there are numerous Christian academics who have started to criticise the underlying framework of liberal democracy. This is because they argue that secular liberal democracy lacks the appropriate morals, ethics and virtues for doing politics. For these Christian scholars, liberal democracy needs to be replaced by a framework that is firmly rooted in explicit Christian ethics, morals and values. The two best known examples of this so called 'New Traditionalism' are John Milbank and the wider Radical Orthodoxy movement and Alastair Macintyre. For the purpose of this thesis there will be a focus on Milbank and the movement of Radical Orthodoxy associated with him

3.11.2: Radical orthodoxy

The radical orthodoxy movement came into existence as a movement that opposed the accommodation of secular values within Christian thinking. Its core principle is that without God and the Christian faith any kind of human thinking is 'atrophy' as Milbank (2017, p43) puts it. As such, any kind of compromise towards secular ideas is profoundly rejected. This is because according to the radical orthodoxy movement human nature can ultimately only be understood through faith. The idea that morals or ethics can exist without any underlying religious ideas is impossible. Without faith the world is nihilistic and void. As such, rather than entering in a dialogue with the wider secular society the aim of radical orthodoxy is to 'reclaim the world' for the Christian faith (Milbank et al 1999, p1). For the radical orthodoxy movement, the Christian faith is all-consuming which leaves no room for compromise or flexibility towards secular ideas or non-Christian beliefs.

3.11.3: Post-liberalism and rejecting liberal democracy

This uncompromising attitude is also extended to the idea of liberal democracy. Building on the ideas of the radical orthodoxy movement Milbank & Pabst (2016) diagnose liberal democracy as terminally ill and in need of replacement. The reason for their diagnosis is that for them liberal democracy is merely a loose collection of individuals and their individual rights, negative liberties and 'rampant market capitalism' and unable to cope with today's problems (Pabst 2017, p500). For Milbank & Pabst (2016) the inability to deal with today's problems comes from the nihilistic and superficial character of liberal democracy which in turn comes from the lack of much needed faith-based ethics, morals and virtues. For them liberal democracy is a secular idea dreamed up by secular philosophers and therefore nihilistic. This lack of values, ethics and virtues has caused liberal democracy to be behind much of the contemporary social inequality and the

ongoing scepticism and distrust towards politics and the rise of populist movements. As such, Milbank & Pabst (2016) see an urgent need for a 'post-liberal' politics that replaces liberal democracy. This replacement is called the politics of virtue. The politics of virtue seeks to construct a 'religious and metaphysically inspired post-liberal movement' that emphasises the collective, the community and reciprocity rather than nihilistic and void individual rights and negative liberties. As such, Milbank & Pabst (2016) attempt to create a form of post-liberal communitarianism that is founded on deeply held Christian beliefs.

3.11.4: Opposing the rejection of liberal democracy

However, scholars like Stout and Wolterstorff sharply criticise the attempts by Milbank & Pabst (2016) and the radical orthodoxy movement to replace liberal democracy. According to Wolterstorff (2005) such critical writings express an *'extremely sour and critical attitude toward liberal democracy'* and *'presumably the destruction of liberal democracy is the effect these writers desire, since they speak of it as a great evil'* (p633). But for Wolterstorff liberal democracy isn't dangerous or in need of replacement and instead Wolterstorff (2005) writes *'I, by contrast, regard it (liberal democracy) as a great good—a gift of God's providential grace to humanity'* (p633). Other share Wolterstorff' analysis and also support the idea of liberal democracy. Especially Stout (2004) devotes large parts of his book 'Democracy and Tradition' to rebutting such arguments. For Stout (2004) liberal democracy is not some individualistic, nihilistic, abstract and empty concept that is dreamed up by philosophers and which has led to societal chaos. Instead liberal democracy is a tradition in its own right. For Stout, liberal democracy is the product of a long history that long pre-dates the well-known liberal philosophers and which is founded upon ordinary people holding each other accountable for what they do and for what reasons they are doing it. But such activities should not be understood:

'*in merely procedural terms. They are activities in which normative commitments are embedded as well as discussed. The commitments are substantive. They guide the discussion, but they are also constantly in dispute, subject to revision, and not fully determinate. They are initially implicit in our reasoning, rather than fully explicit in the form of philosophically articulated propositions. So we must be careful not to reduce them to a determinate system of rules or principles. Because they evolve, we need the historical category of "tradition" to bring them into focus'*.

(p5)

As such, liberal democracy is an enduring discursive practice and much more *'a matter of enduring attitudes, concerns, dispositions, and patterns of conduct than it is a matter of agreement on a conception of justice in Rawls's sense'* (Stout 2004,

p3). Consequently, (liberal) *'democracy, far from being a freestanding set of institutional arrangements and abstract norms essentially opposed to culture, is a culture in its own right* (p195). It's a rich and diverse process that involves many people, ethics, ideas, virtues and traditions and is certainly not void, nihilistic and dreamed up by philosophers. As such, liberal democracy is a practice *that involves and inculcates virtues, including justice, and that becomes a tradition, like any social practice, when it manages to sustain itself across generations'* (Stout 2004, p152). Therefore, rather than being nihilistic and superficial liberal democracy is full of ethics, virtues and justice, including ones based on religion. Also, Wolterstorff (2005) agrees with this analysis and states:

The charge that liberal democracy has no ethical substance, that it destroys all tradition and virtue, is wide of the mark.

(p637)

Of course, Wolterstorff, Stout and also Habermas see that liberal democracy is not without flaws but rather than moving away from liberal democracy and being pessimistic about its usefulness the analysis of Stout (2004) shows that there are still many opportunities to improve and repair liberal democracy by using its own resources and creativity[12]. For Stout, Wolterstorff and also other scholars who oppose restraining religion, improving liberal democracy can also include the usage of religious ideas. As such they strongly disagree with the terminal diagnosis that Milbank & Pabst (2016) give about the current state of liberal democracy. Milbank & Pabst (2016) want to stop using liberal democracy and instead want to overhaul the entire system by implementing their politics of virtue which they perceive to contain the virtues and ethics that liberal democracy is lacking. But I think too that their analysis of liberal democracy is indeed very pessimistic and sour. Within their book and their analysis, liberal democracy is treated as solely the product of a select group of liberal philosophers and void of any interaction with other ideas, traditions, morals or virtues. As such Milbank & Pabst (2016) view liberal democracy as lacking proper grounding in ethics, virtues and tradition and I think as such I have to agree with Stout (2004) and say that liberal democracy is much more diverse and much richer than the analysis of Milbank & Pabst (2016) suggests. A second weak point of Milbank & Pabst (2016) is that they barely engage with the defenders of liberal democracy. In their book there are a few references to Rawls, which they use to paint a very negative picture of Rawls ideas as being void of any ethics or virtues, but any wider engagement with the ideas of defenders of liberal democracy such as for example Stout or Wolterstorff is absent and their book is mostly devoted to discussing their own idea of the politics of

[12] Stout (2004) interpretation of how liberal democracy functions is strongly influenced by the work of Brandom (1998)

virtue. Both Stout and Wolterstorff write about radical orthodoxy more generally rather than Milbank & Pabst (2016) specifically as that book wasn't published when they were writing but with the rather condemning criticism of for example Stout (2004) Milbank & Pabst (2016) do not engage with and only seek to build up their own idea.

3.11.5: Keeping liberal democracy but making democracy more community minded

Of course, there are many problems that face 21st century liberal democracy but to say that climate change or the rise of populism demonstrates that liberal democracy needs to be replaced by another political system is very simplistic and does not acknowledge the potential of liberal democracy to repair and change itself. But Milbank & Pabst (2016) are likely be right that in their assessment that there needs to be more focus on the common good, communities and reciprocity rather than just individuals, especially in the light of the worldwide problem of climate change. As already explained in the introduction of this thesis, addressing climate change through individual behavioural change alone leaves the underlying societal norms that form the roots of the problem untouched and as such more attention to community and society as a whole rather than individuals seems necessary. However, is there any way in which faith-based concerns about a lack of focus on community within liberal democratic thinking can be incorporated without making liberal democracy redundant? The approach of Milbank & Pabst (2016) is not only problematic because it wants to replace liberal democracy with their own alternative, but it is also problematic because it is not based on empirical reality. There is no nation within Western Europe where it would be possible to have a political system that is solely based on Christian theology. Not only would it anger many philosophers, but it would also alienate large parts of the population as the role and influence of Christianity within pluralistic Western societies is just too small for such an all-encompassing Christian approach. It is much more likely and empirically realistic that environmentally concerned Christians and the wider green movement will find shared concerns and common ground between each other and that different faith-based and secular arguments, ideas, narratives and motivations will become tangled up and enable collaborations around shared concerns for the planet. Such coming together of secular and faith-based concerns will enable both sides to learn from each other's insights and perspectives and might enable Christian ethics and values to start 'bubbling up' (Cloke et al 2019, p4) within secular environment groups. In this way more community-oriented Christian values will start to bubble up within the wider society. But it will happen through dialogue, shared concerns and reflexivity rather than through an all-out assault on secular values. The ideas of Cloke et al (2019) will also be further discussed in the next section of this chapter.

3.12: Postsecularity, Habermas and Human Geography

The following sections will discuss how the ideas of Habermas with regards to the role of religion with society have been used by human geographers.

3.12.1: Human geography and the exclusionary side of Habermas

Within human geography there has been substantial engagement with Habermas and his mutual translation proposal. This geographical research has approached Habermas from a more positive side than for example Wolterstorff (2013) or Taylor (2011) and has focused on the side of Habermas' thought that emphasises the mutual character of the translation process and the requirement that secular and religious citizens should engage sincerely with each other's ideas. This geographical research has been using these more positive insights from Habermas to argue that such openness towards religion gives room to a movement in which people engage in an open and self-reflective way with others in society and that this helps them to find commonalities with each other (Cloke & Beaumont 2012). Such an open attitude between secular and religious groups can create crossover narratives through which religious and secular groups can find that they share common concerns and desires and on which they can collaborate on societal problems like homelessness, racism and refugees but also environmental problems. This coming together of different faith based and secular actors have been described as postsecular rapprochement (Cloke & Beaumont 2012). It is important to remark that this approach is not only philosophical but also based on empirical fieldwork. Research on Christian FBO's found that these FBO's are willing to collaborate with others and therefore they have opened themselves towards others that share a similar desire to help marginalised groups. Issues on which such postsecular partnerships have been formed include homelessness, drug addiction and foodbanks (see for example Beaumont & Baker 2011; Cloke et al 2010; Cloke et al 2014; Williams 2015; Cloke et al 2016b). These collaborations whereby Christian FBO's open themselves towards non-Christians partners contain certain 'key discursive technologies' from Habermas' work that are reflected in these collaborations according to Cloke et al (2016a, p498). As such human geographers see certain ideas of Habermas reflected in the open approach that FBO's take towards others who do not share their religious background. For now, human geography scholarship has only engaged with Habermas' ideas about mutual tolerance, learning from each other and sincerely engaging with the other's prospective. This leaves open the question what geographers should do with the exclusionist side of Habermas' work.

3.12.2: How can we use the postsecular?

The fear of the political influence of religion is for Rawls, Audi and also Habermas is not found in societal problems like homelessness or environmental issues but in

the (moral) issues of same sex marriage, abortion and assisted suicide. These are issues were policy proposals are often directly derived from the bible or any other sacred text. For example, Evangelicals often oppose same sex marriage or assisted suicide because they belief that the bible tells them so, and if Evangelicals manage to pass a law which forbids same sex marriage, then this can be seen as enforcing the Evangelical view of same sex marriage upon others. In such a situation Evangelical belief is directly turned into policies that others have to obey and which the government has to uphold. This is strongly opposed that Rawls, Audi, Habermas and many others. They think that these Evangelicals need to find alternative, additional or translated arguments to support or replace their religious objections against same sex marriage rather than directly enforcing their religious view upon the rest of society.

However, I don't think that this fear is justified. Scholars like Habermas, Rawls and Audi easily confuse the political preferences of religious citizens with theocratic ambitions. When someone supports a certain policy based on religious convictions this shows that somebody cares about a certain issue and wants to address this issue. Presenting religious arguments doesn't automatically mean that somebody is trying to extend the influence of his/her faith or attempts to convert others. In the writings of Habermas, Rawls and Audi there seems to be an underlying assumption that religious citizens/organisations always will try to extend the influence of their faith and try to make their belief the rule of the nation. This assumption denies the fact that religious citizens also care about politics and policy proposals in their own right just like everybody else does. Using religious reason doesn't equal trying to extend the influence of your religion. There is no underlying agenda behind citizens giving religious arguments. Even with a deeply controversial theme like abortion, people who give religious arguments seek to influence the political debate in the first place rather than forcing a faith-based worldview upon others. I think that Habermas, Rawls, Audi but also many others don't make a clear distinction between using religious reason as a specific argument to favour a specific policy and using religious reason as a tool to convert others and in an extreme case replacing liberal democracy with some form of theocracy. Habermas and others seem to think that all religious participation eventually leads to an impoverishment of democracy but most religious citizens only seek to participate in debates and discussions and as such only strengthen democratic decision making. Another misconception that Habermas, Rawls and Audi have is that they see religious arguments as an end station. There is an undercurrent within their thought that assumes that when religious citizens bring in religion, then that is their final argument or definitive standpoint. It is their final standpoint and changing their mind will be impossible. Religious reasons are fixed and surrounded by dogma and authority seems to be the assumption. However, this is not how religious citizens use religion during discussions. Religious reason

forms a starting point, not a fixed endpoint. Religious reason is not a fixed recipe in which there is no role for critical thinking or engagement with the arguments of others. Chambers (2010) puts it very clearly

Quoting scripture, for example, need not be an appeal to unquestioned authority but an opening move in a discussion. And even when it is quoted in an authoritative way this too can be challenged with alternative interpretations or alternative passages. The question is not the appeal to scripture but whether someone is open to argument or not, and it is simply a gross misconception to say that religion in general or as such or essentially closes down argument.

Chambers (2010, p19)

As such bringing in religious reasons is not the endpoint of a debate but the starting point of an open and fair-minded debate between different viewpoints. I think that it would be best to reject Habermas' demand for exclusion. Such exclusion is unhelpful and harmful. As already mentioned above, Habermas, Rawls and Audi seem to confuse bringing in religious arguments as a contribution to an ongoing debate with using religious reason as a way to convert people and extend the influence of religion and they also wrongly perceive religious arguments as a final statement of a fixed endpoint. For me it seems like Habermas and others want to exclude the tendencies within religion that seek to extend the influence of religion in society but instead their proposals end up excluding religious citizens whose only intention it is to participate in debates about which they care. As such excluding religion will be harmful to the political participation of religious citizens. It doesn't matter that non-religious citizens are open to religious ideas and are willing to consider them, in the end there is still exclusion put in place only because an argument is religious in nature. Religious citizens already know in advance, before they even start campaigning, writing their MP or protesting, that in the end their 'real' motivations and arguments are to be excluded. As such they are restricted in their political participation, even though their political agenda might live on in a translated form. Knowing that the 'true inspiration' behind your political position is not welcomed will hardly stimulate any religious citizen into getting involved in the political area. As such demanding translation can end up impoverishing political participation. Although Habermas claims that exclusion is necessary to protect democracy it is likely to harm democracy as it places barrier in the way of becoming politically involved. And is religion really more harmful to democracy than for example nationalism? Nationalism has also built up quite a name in terms of being responsible for all kinds all grave violations of human rights and civil war and could as such also be classified as a threat to democracy, but it seems to be welcome in Habermas' framework.

Religious citizens should feel free to use the arguments from the bible or Pope Francis or any other theologian or faith leader to argue for a better protected environment or any other cause that they want to address. The demands by Habermas to translate religious reasons into a 'generally accessible language' will hamper the possibilities for believers to be truly inspired by their belief and damage democracy rather than protect it. As such demands to exclude religious reason will not benefit postsecular partnerships. I think that it would be best for postsecular partnerships as described by Cloke & Beaumont (2012) to ignore the demands to transform religious reason into 'generally accessible language' and instead participants in such partnerships should feel free to rely on any (religious or secular) language that is best suited when they are involved in political advocating rather than making their arguments 'generally accessible' in order to keep political philosophers happy. Leaving religious reasons free doesn't mean that religious citizens can just put forward their religious arguments and ignore what others have to say. Supporters of no restraint on religion like Weithman (2002), Stout (2004) or McConnell (2007) argue throughout their writings that although there should be no restraint on religious reason, this doesn't mean that secular and religious citizens shouldn't try to exchange ideas and find a common ground. Every citizen, regardless of religious or political background should be willing to put his preferences on the table in an open and fair debate, explain why he thinks his ideas are right and try to see the situation from the point of view of those who disagree. Secular and religious citizens should be open towards each other and be willing to listen and learn from the other, discuss differences with an open mind and try to establish common grounds on shared concerns. It is certainly not the intention of the supporters of unrestrained religion to create a political religious movement which just ignores secular ideas and only clusters together within their religious bubble. They want religious and secular citizens to openly discuss with others and consider each other proposals. Religious citizens should be open and willing to consider secular arguments. Allowing religious reason without translation doesn't mean that religion should dominate. People should debate and explore what arguments convince the most, regardless of their origin. Religious citizens should put their presumptions about 'the secular' aside while secular citizens should do the same with their secular presumptions and both should accept that there are limits to their own worldview. During such engagements some religious arguments are likely to end up being put aside but there is no longer a requirement to always do so. As such Habermas' requirement to sincerely engage with fellow citizens, regardless of the secular or religious nature of their ideas and carefully consider their proposals and arguments and never outright dismiss them is still very important. But the demand for exclusion is no longer there.

3.12.3: Finding common grounds for environmental action

However, within the context of environmental issues the collaborations between secular and faith-based groups are likely to be rather different from the collaborations that are described by for example Cloke et al (2014), Williams (2015) or Jamoul & Wills (2008). As discussed in the previous chapter, opinions about environmental issues tend to be polarised and divided along political lines. Arguments and discussions often focus on science and economics and are coloured by political views and even contributions by faith leaders are full of science and economics and are being judged with ideological coloured glasses. When it comes to environmental issues religious voices are still very novel and not well established and the use of religious reason might come as a surprise for seasoned environmental activists. This context stands in contrast with faith-based involvement in social issues like homelessness, foodbanks and refugees. In these issues faith-based groups have participated for sometimes hundreds of years and addressing these issues is often seen as central to a Christian life. With environmental issues there is lot more resistance and unfamiliarity with the subject among Christians.

With so little religious reason taking part in the current debates surrounding environmental issues there seem to be few religious ideas that can be used in 'postsecular partnerships' or which can challenge or inject new viewpoints or narratives into debates. Instead many discussions and disagreements within faith communities rely on secular arguments about science or political ideology. As mentioned before these 'secular' discussions do bring polarisation into church life as is clearly reflected in the criticisms that faith leaders received on their calls for action. Bringing the environment into church and putting the relation between faith and the environment in the spotlight is far from easy. A successful theological narrative as there is with an issue like homelessness within churches seems absent and the findings of empirical studies suggest that environmental issues are an outsider issue that has been brought into church life by environmentally concerned churchgoers rather than stemming from theological exploration within the church context itself. As such environmental issues might present a case where 'generally accessible language' (scientific facts, loss of biodiversity, reducing food waste etc.…) about the environment needs to be translated into faith-based language in to get believers on board. How the process of linking up theological explorations about the environment with secular arguments goes and how these common grounds are then turned into action in a very interesting question that is important for any fruitful collaboration between secular and faith-based partners. Collaborating on environmental issues requires much more than just being open to faith-based ideas and vice versa. This is not only because the presence of secular environmental groups is much stronger than faith-based organisations but also because environmental issues are inherently connected the underlying 'physical'

environmental problems which need to be understood, acknowledged and integrated in faith-based narratives. Environmental problems often rely on scientific evidence and solutions like reducing food waste or rectifying international climate agreements and seem to be far removed from faith. Somehow, faith-based groups or individual believers need to give these secular aspects of environmental issues a place in their faith based environmental concern. Believers need to find ways to connect the two and 'translate' seemingly secular and disconnected language about science, politics and economics into a faith-based argument that is not just convincing for themselves but also for other believers. But at the same time, they also need to construct 'crossover narratives' (Cloke & Beaumont 2012) which enable them to collaborate with secular groups. On top of these translations and crossover narratives do these things not only need to be constructed but they also need to be 'performed' by everyone involved (Stacey 2017) in a context where there is polarisation and little interest in environmental issues in churches but also in the wider society.

Even though environmental issues might be struggling to become mainstream within Christianity there are still many Christians who see environmental issues as a very important aspect of their faith. Due to the novelty of environmental issues for many believers and the ongoing dominance of science and ideology there is for now an absence of environmental FBO's and if environmentally concerned Christians want to be involved in environmental issues (especially in a more practical way) they are very likely to end up in a secular organisation. How these Christians are able to combine their willingness to get more involved in environmental issues with their religious background and how they construct their faith based environmental concerns towards the outside world is a very interesting question that has not yet been research. Many secular individuals and secular groups have acknowledged religion as a motivator for action and say that they are open and welcome religious individuals (see also chapter 1). If this acknowledgement is sincere, then there might be room for religious ideas within secular environmental organisations. This then might lead to a situation in which believers are welcomed within secular environmental groups and are (to a certain extent) allowed to bring in their religious ideas. Such an opening up of secular environmental organisations might be considered some form of postsecular rapprochement as described by Cloke & Beaumont (2012) but rather than Christian FBO's giving space to non-Christian voices it is secular environmental organisations that are giving space to Christians who might be lacking such a space within their own faith community. However, it might also turn out to be the case that as many Christians are already familiar with the arguments about science, economics and politics, secular groups might prefer to keep 'controversial' faith-based arguments outside such collaborations and instead that focus on the polarised but secular arguments that are already shared by both sides.

Consequently, secular organisations might have little interest in learning from faith-based views.

For now, secular ideas and approaches are likely to remain dominant even if eco-theology is able to become mainstream within church life. Environmental problems are inherently linked to scientific research, polarised solutions and drastic lifestyle changes. Daunted by this prospective some churchgoers might try to steer their church away from such controversial political issues and prefer to keep concepts like stewardship and creation care free from any controversy. However, environmentally problems cannot be addressed alone with an annual ‘Green Sunday service’. It could certainly be true that churches can encourage individual members of congregations to make their lifestyles more sustainable and churches may be very good at this aspect but environmental issues extent beyond the churchyard and cannot be sufficiently addressed if individuals or organisations do not engage in the wider society. As such it is vital to connect theological explorations about the environment with a willingness to take part in the wider society which in turn needs to be reciprocated by a willingness of the wider society to listen to religious ideas and allow these ideas to help and steer discussion and decision making about environmental problems.

Chapter 4:

Research Methodology

4.1: Aim of the thesis

In the previous two chapters two main arguments were made. Firstly, it was argued that there are scholars who see religion as a resource full of teachings, morals, funding, volunteers and extensive networks that can used to make believers and others interested, concerned and involved with environmental issues (see for example Kolmes & Butkus 2007; Hall et al 2009; Dasgupta & Ramanathan 2014; McLeod & Palmer 2015). But that these hopeful views about the potential of religion are also being questioned by scholars who argue that religion and especially Christianity has having a negative influence on environmental concern and willingness to address environmental problems (Taylor et al 2016b), that faith-based arguments only play a small role in environmental discussions (see chapter two) and that actual faith-based engagement with the environment by churches and other faith-based organisations is struggling to move beyond statements and calls for action (see Harmannij 2019 for an overview). Secondly, it was argued that although secular and faith-based groups are showing signs of shared concerns about the environment and do seem to be willing to have, at least on paper, some kind of a collaboration, it is also an issue whereby faith-based groups are still small and mostly focused on educating believers and where most debates deal with political, scientific and economic arguments. As such it was argued that within the context environmental issues 'postsecular rapprochement' as defined by Cloke & Beaumont (2012) would be very different from homelessness or refugees and that within the context of environmental issues successful collaboration between of faith and no-faith would largely depend on the willingness of secular groups to incorporate faith-based ideas and practices into their organisations.

This thesis aims to understand how with environmental issues still being rather marginal in churches but with secular environmental groups showing interest in collaboration, how churches are relating to the environment to their Christian faith and how environmentally concerned Christians are trying to engage with their fellow believers and how they work together with others with other non-Christians. The goal is to understand how believers are trying to build a faith-based narrative about the environment for themselves and the wider church within a space that is dominated by scientific and ideological inspired narratives and secondly, whether after the successful conception of such a narrative it is able to complement or inspire existing scientific and ideological approaches towards environmental problems that are present within the wider green movement. As such the main research question for this thesis is:

How do churchgoers and environmentally concerned Christians engage with the environment, both within the church and the wider society and how do they collaborate with the wider green movement?

By critically analysing the ways in which faith and the environment are related among believers, turned into action and how environmentally concerned Christians try to convince their fellow churchgoers about the urgent need to step up their commitment to ‘care for creation’ and how they collaborate with secular groups is what this thesis seeks to find out.

4.2: Outline of Chapter

What will follow now is a section on the wider qualitative approach of this thesis and why a qualitative approach is useful for this thesis followed by a section on why I choose to do much of my research with the organisation Green Christian. After that there will explain the two ways in which data was gathered. This be followed-up by sections giving more detailed explanation of the various methods that I used during my fieldwork and I why I used them will be given. After that my own positionality and the problems of being an insider/outsider (the insider/outside problem will also be discussed in the section on participant observations). After that there will be a section on research ethics followed by a conclusion.

4.3: Qualitative focus of thesis

As already discussed in chapter two, many quantitative studies have already shed light on the relationship between the Christian faith and the environment. These studies have often argued that there is either no relation or a negative relationship between religion and how much believers care about the environment (see chapter two). However, these studies also rely survey data that doesn’t allow detailed explanation or feedback by respondents (in most cases researcher and participant will never meet). With surveys the answers that you get will allow you to assess the overall picture of a certain issue among a target population but what drove participants to choose the answers the way that they did will remain unknown to the researcher. The goal of this thesis is to understand believers and their concerns and go beyond merely appreciating calls for action or noting a potential for collaboration. This thesis really wants to understand how faith and the environment relate on a personal and church level to their beliefs and how they practically work together with secular groups. How people feel and think about their faith and its relation to the environment is the focus and as such, direct and in-depth engagement with participants rather than indirect engagement via surveys is needed. This need to have an in-depth understanding of the participants is best met by qualitative methods. The aim of this thesis is to understand how believers turn personal beliefs into practice and collaboration with secular groups and as such it produces research questions which cannot be adequately answered with more quantitative methods like fixed answers from a questionnaire. Faith-based practice is diverse and fixed answers, although very useful to get a general overview about issues surrounding faith and the environment, will not enable the

researcher to ask the detailed and in-depth questions he needs to ask to answer his research questions nor does it give respondents the opportunity to explain his/her faith and how it spurs them into undertaking action.

4.4: Quantitative survey

This of course, doesn't mean that quantitative research is useless within this research context because although there are very high expectations about environmentally concerned Christians there is very little known about them from quantitative studies. Most studies focus on the overall Christian population or particular denominations like Catholics, Presbyterians or Mormons or particular 'theological schools' such liberal Protestants and fundamentalist Baptists or they focus on Christians who are well-known to be more sceptical and dismissive towards the environment (especially Evangelicals in the USA). But there are no studies that specifically focus on Christians who care about the environment and who are willing to put their concerns into action. As such, there are no quantitative studies which analyse what drives these Christians to care about the environment and what role their faith plays within this. This makes it is difficult to compare the findings from this thesis about environmentally concerned Christians with other studies as these studies never differentiate between Catholics, Protestants or Anglicans who care about the environment and those Catholics, Protestants and Anglicans who don't care. All studies take for example, Catholics, Anglicans or Mormons as single groups (regardless of how much members within these groups differentiate in their care about the environment) and examine how they differ from the non-religious, Buddhists or Hindus and thereby missing the effect that faith-based environmental concern might have on some group members (for studies who takes such an approach see for example Hayes & Marangudakis 2001; Arbuckle & Konisky 2015; Morris et al 2015). As such, to better understand the more general overall picture of environmentally concerned Christians, a survey was distributed through the email newsletter of a faith-based environmental group.

4.5: Methods used in this thesis

The empirical basis of this thesis was gathered through two strands of fieldwork.

The first part consists of fieldwork conducted in local churches in Exeter by using the method of focus groups. This part of the fieldwork focused on different congregations and how they related their Christian faith to the environment and how they turn their faith-based concerns about the environment into action. The aim was to focus on the 'ordinary churchgoers' and understand how they see the link between faith and the environment rather than understanding how high-ranking faith leaders or deeply committed Christian environmental activists see such a link. This first part of the fieldwork focused on the sub-research question:

How do churchgoers relate and engage with the environment and how is this relationship turned into action?

The second part of the fieldwork focuses on environmentally concerned Christians. This fieldwork is centred on the faith based environmental group Green Christian. This part of the fieldwork tries to understand how deeply environmentally concerned Christians relate their faith to the environment, how they turn it into action, both as participants of a committed FBO but also as individual members of churches were the environment might be much less prominent. For this part of the research the thesis will use in-depth interviews with members and supporters of Green Christian and participant observations during activities that were organised by Green Christian. However, the fieldwork does not only want to understand how environmentally concerned Christians relate faith to the environment within the faith-based context but also how they try to bring some of their faith based environmental concerns into secular groups in which they are involved and how these environmentally concerned Christians and secular groups are finding ways to work together. This part of the fieldwork also relies on in-depth interviews with its members and supporters of Green Christian, but it also uses interviews with the leadership of environmental groups from the Exeter area. These interviews focus on the different ways that participants relate and engage with the environment rather than Green Christian as an organisation alone and for the leaders of the secular groups they focused on the role of religion within their organisation and what faith could offer their secular organisations. Lastly, there was a questionnaire distributed among members and supporters of Green Christian to get a better overview of some of the general characteristics that environmentally concerned Christians have. This second part the fieldwork especially tried to answer sub-research questions two, three and four. These are the questions:

How do environmentally concerned Christians relate and engage with the environment and how is this relationship turned into action? And in what ways is this different compared with 'ordinary churchgoers'?

What difficulties are environmentally concerned Christians experiencing? And how are environmentally concerned Christians finding a shared concern for the environment with their fellow believers?

How are environmentally concerned believers finding common ground with secular groups and how do they collaborate with each other? And to what extent are secular groups willing to give space to faith-based motivation?

Apart from these two sets of fieldwork there were also several, often one-off events that I also attended for my research. These events were often in and around Exeter and organised by local churches or I was invited by Green Christian members to attend them. During my PhD study at the University of Exeter I also went to church on Sundays and attended bible studies and other events, as I had been doing for my whole life. Although ethnographical research about the role of the environment within a church context wasn't part of my research[13] during Sunday services or bible studies you will often end up talking about your work and such I ended up talking quite a bit about my research with people at my own church. When I talked about my own research churchgoers would then often respond by expressing their interest or acknowledge that climate change is an important issue, or they would say that it is an unfamiliar issue, or they would simply show no interest and move the conversation politely on. As such my own involvement in church did indirectly inform my understanding of how churchgoers engage with the environment. My own experiences in church formed a sort of sounding board for my findings during the fieldwork.

4.6: Why choose Green Christian?

What will follow now is an explanation about why Green Christian was chosen. Green Christian is one of only a few national Christian environmental groups, the others being A Rocha UK and the John Ray Initiative. It has to be added that larger faith-based development organisations like Christian Aid, CAFOD and TearFund are also increasingly paying attention to environmental problems, especially through the scope of problems in third world countries. However, Green Christian and A Rocha are the only national Christian organisations that are completely dedicated to the environment. Both Green Christian and A Rocha UK have also set up smaller organisations (Operation Noah, Hope for the Future and Eco-Church) to focus on specific issues. Both Green Christian and A Rocha are national organisations and as such this thesis lacks insights from a dedicated faith-based environmental groups at more local levels. However, as far as I'm aware there are currently no dedicated local or regional faith-based environmental groups. There are a few monasteries and some churches that have made the environment a top priority but they still remain first and foremost houses of worship and attending worship services or other events with them doesn't require a specific commitment to a green agenda.

At the first it was the idea to use Green Christian as a case study and to understand how Green Christian, as a faith-based organisation, seeks to find its voice and place within the field of environmental issues. Green Christian was especially interesting due to the fact that part of its mission statement seemed to

[13] For such a PhD thesis see Crosby (2016)

reflect some kind of 'postsecular mind set'. In its mission statement it states that its aim is to *'offer insights into ecology and the environment to Christian people and churches'* but also to *'offer Christian insights to the Green movement'* (Green Christian 2017). Its goal is not to merely form a closed group of environmentally concerned Christians but to open itself up to ideas from the wider green movement but also to attempt to insert some of its own ideas into the wider green movement. Originally, Green Christian was founded as Christian Ecology Link during a Green party conference in 1982 (or Ecology party as it was called then) and sought to make a link between Christians and the Green party and also the wider environmental movement. This desire to have a two-way dialogue with the wider secular green movement seems to reflect some the intention of the calls by philosophers, political theorists and also human geographers (as discussed in chapter three) to be open and reflective towards secular and faith-based contributions and to be willing to learn from someone' else prospective. However, at the moment Green Christian mostly focuses on engaging churches and fellow believers about the importance of the environment. Green Christian itself has 870 official paying members (down from 928 in 2017) and around 1,300 people (down from over 2,000 due to new privacy regulations) who receive its newsletter according to its most recent annual report from 2018. With less than 1,000 official members Green Christian might seem very small in size for a national ecumenical organisation but despite its relative small size it remains one of the few dedicated faith-based environmental groups. Green Christian is for most of its members only small part of their involvement in environmental issues. Outside Green Christian many are involved as individuals in secular groups and try to give the environment more prominence within their local congregation. As such rather than being a case study about the national faith-based organisation 'Green Christian' this thesis will be about the triangle in which most environmentally concerned Christians find themselves. On one side they are involved in Green Christian or at least support its ideas and also seek to bring in or stir up concern about the environment among their fellow churches. But on the other side they are active in secular environment groups and have long established shared concerns about the environment with others within the green movement. But in both situations, they come across difficulties. Within churches they are faced from time to time with disinterest or even hostility while within secular organisations there is sometimes little attention to their religious motivations. Within such a situation Green Christian as an organisation acts as a space where environmental concerned Christians can meet similar minded Christians and get encouraged by others and also receive training on how to engage fellow believers and do more study on what the Christian faith has to say about the environment. As such Green Christian wasn't the specific focus of this thesis but rather acted a starting point to explore and understand how environmentally concerned Christians relate to the environment and act out their faith-based concerns about the environment. This doesn't mean that Green

Christian was merely a point of access to environmentally concerned Christians. Green Christian was also researched as part of the triangle between church, secular organisation and faith-based organisation in which many environmental mentally concerned Christians move. But the goal was to understand the entire triangle rather than just the Green Christian part.

4.7: Outline rest of the methods

What will follow now is a discussion of the different research methods that I have used for this thesis. First, there will be a discussion of the questionnaire that was distributed among the receivers of the Green Christians newsletter. Secondly, the focus groups with the churches in Exeter will be discussed. Thirdly, there will be a discussion of the in-depth interviews done with the members and supporters of Green Christian as well as the leadership of secular environmental groups and lastly, the participant observations during Green Christian activities will be discussed.

4.7.1: Questionnaire

The focus of this thesis is qualitative, but this doesn't mean that there will be no quantitative data at all. In the UK there are only a total of three studies that focus on the relationship between faith and the environment from a more quantitative prospective (Hayes & Marangudakis 2000; Hayes & Marangudakis 2001; Village 2015). But these studies compare environmental attitudes and behaviour of 'believers' (not specific environmentally concerned) with the rest of society. As such these 'environmentally concerned Christians' remain a rather hidden group and there is no existing research on who these people are, that they do or what their motives are. There is much hopeful speculation about what they can offer to the green movement and the wider society but there are no quantitative studies or other kinds of statistics that depict a more general picture of 'the environmentally concerned Christian'. Most research (often US focused) has found that especially conservative theology has a negative impact on environmental attitudes (see Taylor et al 2016a for an overview) but whether this means that most environmentally concerned Christians are more theologically liberal, politically liberal or that something else is playing a role is unclear. Therefore, this thesis needed a better understanding of the wider phenomena of 'environmentally concerned Christians' because otherwise there would be an in-depth understanding about a few specific cases without any knowledge about the wider characteristics of this field of study from which the specific findings of this thesis arise. Therefore, a survey was distributed among supporters and members of Green Christians through their email newsletter.

However, religion is also notoriously hard to grasp with a questionnaire. For a start there is the problem what religion actually is? Some scholars devote their entire life understanding the meaning of religion in all its forms and shapes and still disagree with each other (see for example de Vries 2008 for a 1,000 page long exploration of the concept 'religion'). Questionnaires that try to measure religion are also faced with problem that people are trying to present themselves as more committed and devote than that they really are. The case of over reporting church attendance by quite a large margin in well-known with the social sciences (see for example Hadaway et al 1993; Marler & Hadaway 1999; Hadaway & Marler 2005; Brenner 2011a; Rossi & Scappini 2012)[14]. In a similar fashion Muslims have also been found to over report the number of times that they pray (Brenner 2013). Another issue is that the wording and the context of questions does have a profound influence on the answer that people give. In the UK both the UK census and British social attitudes survey asked about people about their religion in 2001 but both asked different questions and as a consequence 72% identified as Christian in the UK census but only 54% was Christian according to the British social attitudes survey (see Voas & Bruce 2004). These examples clearly show the difficulty of measuring religion with surveys. But despite these potential problems I still decided to go ahead as it was also really difficult to get an overview of the supporters and members of Green Christians that went beyond personal stories and participant observations. As such the survey would give a much-needed general overview. The survey consisted of 14 questions and was distributed through the Green Christian email newsletter. The distribution through Green Christian was done on purpose in order make sure that the survey was only filled in by people who were sympathetic to Green Christian and its goals rather than the general population or believers in general. The 14 questions tried to explore some of the general characteristics of environmentally concerned believers (like age, gender and political preference), their theological convictions, their experiences in church with the environment and their links with secular groups. The survey was quite short (as attention span with online surveys is rather short) but it suited the goal of providing more general background information about all the participants. The survey can be found in the appendix 3.

4.7.2: Focus groups

The origin of focus groups as a research method within the social sciences can be traced back to the first part of the 20th century when the first social scientists started to use it as a research method (see Bogardus 1926 and Merton & Kendall 1946 for some early application). But a surge in popularity came towards the end of

[14] Church attendance is a very common approach to measure the religiosity which in turn is then examined for any influence on environmental concern, environmental attitudes or willingness to give money to environmental causes, even though the measurement of religiosity might potentially be wrong in the first place.

1970's when market researchers discovered focus groups as a way to help them understand how consumers form their attitudes towards products, companies or brands (see especially Calder 1977 but also Churchill Jr 1979). As such focus groups have not only been used by academics but also by many R & D departments and specialist marketing research bureaus in order to hear 'the voice of the consumer' (Griffin & Houser 1993) and it is through these attempts to understand the voice of the consumer that focus groups for example have ended up as being a very useful tool for the tobacco industry in its attempts to sell more tobacco (For historical overviews of the use focus groups see Lee 2010 and Tadajewski 2016). Nowadays focus groups still remain a popular tool among market researchers and the wider academic discipline of marketing to understand what consumers think about products, brands or companies and what influences or changes these attitudes. The number of studies with focus groups done on consumer attitudes towards particular goods, products or services is sheer endless (see for example Knutson (2000); Carrigan & Attalla (2001); Bruhn et al (2002); Pahl-Wostl et al (2003); , Joergens (2006); Lampila et al (2009); Bray et al 2011; Lalor et al (2011). But not only marketing firms and business schools have extensively used focus group also other social science disciplines have made extensive use of focus groups. Virtually, every discipline that uses qualitative research methods has also used focus groups. The studies which use focus groups cover an incredibly diverse range of topics. They include topics like Hiv stigma (Wagner et al 2016), attitudes towards safe sex practices (Davis et al 2014; Herrman et al 2017), the drinking culture among elderly Korean immigrants (Kim 2009), food deserts in the UK (Whelan et al 2002) and perceptions of safety in city centres (Pain & Townshend 2002), end-of-life experiences (Munn et al 2008), Muslim youth in the post 9/11 society (Peek 2003; Hopkins 2007) and also topics like drink driving and dangerous driving (Basch et al 1989, Glendon 2013) , primary school students' perceptions of interactive whiteboards (Hall & Higgins 2005) and even women's douching practices (Lichtenstein & Nansel 2001) have been studied with the help of focus groups. Focus groups have also been popular in health and disability studies, where they have been used to understand the perceptions of for example people with chronic low back pain (Liddle et al 2007), how people with a low incomes cope with tooth ache (Cohen et al 2007), the experiences of people with asthma (Jonsson et al 2014), the perspectives of people with cerebral palsy (Wiart et al 2009; Claassen et al 2011; Verschuren et al 2012; Lauruschkus et al 2015) and the mobility of elderly people around care homes (Lu et al 2011; Rudiek et al 2014). As such focus groups have been used in a wide variety disciplines and for wide range of topics.

As the name already suggests, the focus group method is a way to conduct research where the focus in on a selected group of participants. In its most basic form, a focus group is a gathering of selected participants who discuss about a

selected topic. The goal of focus groups is '*to describe and understand meanings and interpretations of a select group of people to gain an understanding of a specific issue from the perspective of the participants of the group'* (Liamputtong 2011)[15]. For many scholars this 'group element' is the defining characteristic of focus groups which sets it apart from other qualitative research methods. Or as Morgan (2011)[16] puts it: *'the hallmark of focus groups is their explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group'* (Introduction, p2). Similarly, Liamputtong (2011) argues that *'focus groups permit researchers to enter the world of the participants which other research methods may not be able to do'* (Introduction, p7). As such focus groups provide an opportunity *'to witness one of the most important processes for the social sciences – social interaction'* (Madriz 2003, p372). So, for many scholars focus groups are a research method that will give them access to understanding group dynamics and interactions between participants that are at plays in group settings. Therefore focus groups don't try to find definite answers nor do they try to get all participants to agree on a certain statement or opinion but rather focus groups seek to understand how people construct, understand and contest meanings and opinions about a wide variety of topics. At the same time, some scholars have complained that focus groups are seen as a quick and easy way to gather lots of 'quotable' data and that in fact group dynamics barely play a role in the analysis of most focus groups studies. Most published studies rather focus on quotes from individuals and pay little attention to the wider group interactions according to critics (Smithson 2000; Farnsworth & Boon 2010; Morgan 2010; Moen et al 2010). According to Smithson (2000): '*the use of focus groups as a quick data-gathering method, ending up with some 'soundbite' quotations to illustrate themes, ignores the complexities of focus group behaviour'* (p116). Instead, Smithson (2000) argues that focus groups are a performance and data gathered from focus groups should not be seen as *'previously formed, static things'* that participants bring into the focus group (p116) and which belong to either to individuals nor to the whole group but rather as discourses that emerge during the focus group. As such focus groups can provide unique insights into the dynamics that are involved in groups or communities but they should also be treated like that and not be conflated with findings from in-depth interviews or ethnographical research.

The dynamics behind how groups form their opinions on issues is also the focus for the focus groups that were conducted for this thesis. Therefore, the attention for the focus groups is on how the participants see the role of the environment in the

[15] Liamputtong (2011) is a book but for the purpose of this thesis an electronic copy was downloaded from the website http://methods.sagepub.com/ Page numbering will be different from hard copies.
[16] Morgan (2011) is a book but for the purpose of this thesis an electronic copy was downloaded from the website http://methods.sagepub.com/ Page numbering will be different from hard copies.

church context, rather than their private life. It might well be that some participants are deeply committed or the opposite and very sceptical about environmental issues but within the church context that they have to deal with those who may be more or lesser committed. As such churchgoers need to find a way to bring the environment into church. It is true that church leaders have a substantial amount of influence over churchgoers and some American research has suggested that clergy who give attention to environmental issues or other political issues increase concern about these issues among congregants (see Djupe & Hunt 2009; Wallsten & Nteta 2016) but the environment remains an issue whereby there are likely to be opposing views among believers. Churches are present in almost every part of society and draw members from many different backgrounds. It is of course true that some churches appeal to certain type of people (especially immigrant churches) and many churches are associated with specific theological interpretations that appeal to ideas that might prevail more among certain groups of people but churches often have a membership base that consists of people from many different socio-economic backgrounds and who all share, despite their differences in terms of income, age, educational level or political preference and so on, the same pews on Sunday. With such a diverse membership engaging with an often as a novel and politically controversial perceived topic like the environment is likely to create a situation in which not all opinions are the same and where some form of negotiating and debating will have to take place among members. But churches are also communities of believers that share certain values and beliefs rather than merely being a loose collection of individuals who happen to listen to the same sermon. Church members operate as a community and it is very unlikely that a church will be able to an eco-church if climate change is openly denied by some churchgoers. Churches are communities and as such they need to be able to bring together the different views that exist among the churchgoers and find ways that enable them to address societal problems. In such a context the group dynamics that occur when participants talk about the environment are very important. The goal of the focus group is then not to get some interesting quotes from individual participants to illustrate themes that appear from the analysis but rather to understand the group processes that take place when churches engage with the environment.

In total 5 focus groups were conducted with churches in Exeter. The churches that took part in the focus group interviews were a Methodist Church, a more liberal leaning Anglican Church (Church of England), a charismatic Evangelical church (also Church of England), A Roman Catholic Church and an independent Evangelical church (this church had been awarded an A Rocha bronze Eco church award). These churches were chosen because they reflected different theological views and therefore could very well have different theological approaches to the environment. With these 5 churches the thesis does not attempt to understand the

wider denomination of which these 5 churches are part (that would probably require something like 5 churches from each denomination) but the goal of the focus groups is to understand how different churches in Exeter engage with the environment. The 5 churches were chosen to reflect the theological diversity in Exeter and as such it is difficult to generalise findings beyond Exeter. It is of course true that there are other churches/denominations in Exeter that are not part of the 5 focus groups, churches with presence in Exeter that were not included are the United Reformed Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon), Jehovah Witnesses and Quakers[17]. However, the 5 chosen churches do reflect the vast majority of churches in Exeter. Due to the focus on Exeter the results from the focus groups don't say anything about the perhaps different ways in which churches in highly urbanised environments might engage with the environment nor does it show how migrant churches engage with the environment, and neither does it pay attention to the ways in which churches in rural areas might relate differently to the environment. It may very well be that some findings will also be found in other context outside Exeter but too much generalisation to other contexts should be avoided.

Five focus groups might seem like a very low number in order to understand how churches in Exeter engage with the environment. Of course, focus groups are not the only method that is used in this thesis but research has argued that data saturation comes rather quickly with focus groups. As little as two to three focus groups already reveal more 80% of discoverable themes (Guest et al 2017). Also the aim for the focus group is rather modest. Rather than seek to understand how churches in the UK engage with the environment this thesis takes a more modest approach and seeks to do an explorative study about the role of the environment with a limited set of churches within the specific context of Exeter.

However, although focus groups give 'rich and complex' data (Kitzinger 2005, p68) and reveal unique insights into group dynamics they are also difficult to set up and execute. Setting up focus groups also takes a lot of time and requires a lot of

[17] How the United Reformed Church (URC) engages with the environment has not yet been studied by academics. But the URC often collaborates with the Methodist Church which has been included in the thesis. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints has been extensively studied in the USA context. In line with much of the studies discussed earlier in chapter 1 these studies suggest that Mormon beliefs have a negative impact or very little to no impact on environmental concern (see Olson-Hazboun et al 2017; Peterson & Liu 2008; Brehm & Eisenhauer 2006; Hunter & Toney 2005). Jehovah Witnesses have also not been studied up to now but research suggests that a strong focus on the end time (as the Jehovah Witnesses have) will have a negative effect on environmental concern (Barker & Bearce 2013). Although numerically a very small denomination, Quakers are very active in the area of environmental issues. They are the only denomination that as a denomination (as opposed to taking part as individual believers) participates in climate marches or demonstrations. They often carry banners during demonstrations that explicitly identify them as Quakers and they are also involved in direct non-violent action against for example fracking. This highly visible and activist approach builds on a long legacy of action among Quakers.

planning and willingness from the participants. Therefore, letting the focus groups take place in and around Exeter, where I was familiar with the churches and people attending these churches was seen as the best option to get successful focus groups. The five churches mentioned above were the only churches that were approached. All the churches were approached through my personal network. There were no churches that refused to participate. The churches were approached through individuals within these five churches who were known to me or others in the geography department and who were willing to help me set up these focus groups. These people were co-organisers of the focus groups and they helped me to find sufficient numbers of participants. They also arranged the location of the focus group. In the end the focus groups varied in size ranging from 5 participants in the Catholic Church to 20 in the charismatic Evangelical church. After repeated attempts and despite having an eco-church award it was not possible to find a sufficient number of participants with the independent Evangelical church, so instead there were two interviews with individuals who attended that church and I had the chance to talk with some churchgoers informally. With the other churches the focus group did take place. The focus groups were always part of a church gathering. With Methodists it was the theme of a bible study, with the Charismatic Evangelical church the focus group was part of a walk-in session with lunch which took place on a weekly basis, for the Anglican Church it was the topic of a discussion group and with the Catholic Church the focus group took place after the Mass had finished. As such the focus groups were always part of a known church event, or happened immediately after it had finished and most respondents who participated in the focus groups usually participated in the event that the focus group had replaced. This might have made some participants feel obligated to participate but participants were always free to refuse participation or leave during the interview. During each focus group someone from the church leadership was present and participated in the focus group. In most cases this was the priest or the minister. This presence of the church leadership might have restrained some participants in their answers, especially in the Catholic Church the answers from priest were never opposed by other participants. But this unopposed position of the leadership during the focus groups is not a necessarily something that makes the results from the focus groups less valuable. Church leaders are very powerful actors, whose opinions and judgements carry a lot of weight and authority, also during other church activities. Their opinions are also likely to have remained dominant or even unchallenged if they would have discussed environmental issues in a different setting.

During these focus groups the attention was on how the participants related to the environment and what this meant for their Christian faith, both themselves and the church as a whole. After the participants had formulated what their faith might have to say about the environment, I tried to make participants think about the

consequences of this relationship for themselves, for the church and the wider society. Finally, the participants discussed the ways in which they and their church could help to address environmental problems. In the end, the focus groups lasted from 1 hour and 4 minutes to 1 hour and 41 minutes. The focus group interviews had starting questions and topics that were of interest to me but there was no fixed lists of questions and participants (and also myself) were free to divert from these topics if they felt that their question or answer was relevant to the discussion within the focus group. All the focus group interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants. The focus groups focused on three themes. First, we discussed what the relationship was between their faith and the environment. Secondly, we discussed what role the environment played within church life. Thirdly, we discussed how Christians can put their concerns and ideas about environment into practice and lastly we discussed about how Christian join the rest of society in addressing environmental issues.

4.7.3: Participant Observations

Participant observation is a frequently used qualitative method within the social sciences, including human geography, but it is often seen as the central and defining research method in cultural anthropology (Musante & DeWalt 2010). With the method of participant observation the goal is to get a full insight and in-depth understanding of the daily activities, experiences interactions and rituals that take place within a particular group of people or organisation. To understand these activities and interactions, scholars who use participant observations, try to embed themselves as best as possible among the people that they try to observe and understand. According to Becker (1958):

The participant observer gathers data by participating in the daily life of the group or organization he studies. He watches the people he is studying to see what situations they ordinarily meet and how they behave in them. He enters into conversation with some or all of the participants in these situations and discovers their interpretations of the events he has observed. (p652)

In the past some scholars have described their participant observations as ‘going native’ or ‘becoming one of them’ but such strong assumptions about the ability to embed themselves and blend in despite their outsider position have strongly criticised by scholars and been debunked as completely impossible (see also Tedlock 1991). But it remains a fact that for all participant observers, despite the difficulty of blending in, they try to become an insider and observe ‘daily life’ as it takes place before their eyes.

Participant observation as a research method has a long history. Its start has been traced back to the work of anthropologists like Malinowski (1922) and Mead (1928) in the early 20th century. These scholars did research among various tribal communities that lived mostly isolated from the rest of the world. It is true that some contemporary anthropologists still work and live among isolated tribal communities (see Fortier 2009 for an overview of much contemporary work) but nowadays participant observations are no longer necessarily far away. The participant observations came much closer to home from the 1930's and onwards when it started to gain traction through the so called community studies that were associated with the Chicago School approach. These studies sought to understand communities by extensive use of participant observations (see Lohman 1937; Kluckhohn 1940; Hollingshead 1948; Arensberg 1954). For practitioners of community studies, communities were relative stable and self-functioning social systems and participant observation was the best method to study this cultural phenomenon. Participant observation '*gives us more information about the event under study than data gathered by any other sociological method'* as Becker & Geer (1957,p28) put it. This approach of studying communities by means of participant observation was very popular has led to steady stream of studies (Becker 1956; Tanner 1964; Sullivan, Jr et al 1958). These community studies did not only focus on the Western world but focused communities from around the world (see Cline 1952; Fried 1954; Beardsley 1954). But from the late 1960's and onwards community studies fell increasingly out of favour and scholars started to abandon the community studies approach (see Stacey 1969). But although community studies disappeared from the social science curriculum, the method of participant observation remained strong. Nowadays participant observation is a well-known method that is highly valued by many scholars.

However, the method of participant observation is not an easy method to perform in the field. Observing and participating within an unfamiliar setting with the goal to fully understand the phenomenon, is virtually impossible for any researcher. The people who are being observed are likely to act differently if they know that they are being observed and the researcher is unfamiliar with his surroundings and full of assumptions and expectations that will steer how he/she gathers and interprets data. This is problem with participant observations has been widely acknowledged and also the practitioners of the community studies already saw this problem (see for example Hill & Whiting 1950; Vidich 1955; Schwartz & Schwartz 1955; Zelditch, Jr 1962; Babchuk 1962; Olesen & Whittaker 1967). All these studies argue that the researcher is not objective and full of pre-assumptions that will influence how who observes and analyses his findings. Writing about participant observation Vidich (1955) argues:

Data collection does not take place in a vacuum. Perspectives and perceptions of social reality are shaped by the social position and interests of both the observed and the observer as they live through a passing present.

(p360)

In order to address this problem scholars have proposed several solutions. The early proponents of participant observation had a very simple solution but not very ethical solution. They simple didn't tell members of the communities or organisations that were involved that they were researchers and that they were doing participant observations. For example, Melbin (1954) described how he worked as a salesman for more than 6 months in a department store and how he made secretly participant observations and that none of his co-workers or customers knew anything about his research. So called fully and partial disguised participant observations were a normal practices[18]. Although disguised participant observations don't solve the flaws of the researcher they do seem to somewhat limit the performance of socially desirable behaviour by those who are being observed. Later researchers argued that it would be better to use 'native anthropologists' (Jones 1970; Ohnuki-Tierney 1984). With this they meant that rather than using 'outsider' academic researchers to carry out the participant observations they wanted people from within the community or organisation to carry out the research. This idea of being an insider is very important for many. Attaining the status of insider is something all participant observers try to achieve. Haniff (1985) puts this very strongly as she argues:

It is only when we are perceived and accepted as an insider that we can truly understand the meaning of the lives we study.

(p112)

The assumption behind this idea is the thought that knowledge offers insights which are (nearly) impossible to understand from an outsider prospective. Therefore 'insiders' are preferred. But such a view also brings the risk of creating a situation whereby scholars only work in the field to which they are closely connected/insider. It leads to '*balkanization of social science, with separate baronies kept exclusively in the hands of Insiders'* as Merton (1972,p13) argues. Also people from the inside or with insider connections are not without pre-assumptions and might not be able to distance themselves from their subjects. Some have also argued that '*the very act of conducting research places an 'insider' in an 'outsider' position'* (Gilbert 1994, p95, note 2). As such insiders who switch to the role of researcher inevitably have to renegotiate their position (Innes 2009). Therefore, de Andrade (2000) argues that we should not be arguing about insiders

[18] See Routledge (2002) for a more modern study whereby disguised participant observations were used.

and outsiders as something that is achieved. But as something that is subject to ongoing evaluation and negotiating. It is more fluid rather than a dichotomy according to Thompson & Gunter (2011).

Nowadays, scholars have widened the discussion beyond insider and outsider (although outsider/outsider dilemmas are still very important). Rather scholars talk about positionality. The positionality of the researcher is a very important topic and nowadays most contemporary textbooks about qualitative methods will teach students that everyone has a positionality that it will play up when he or she enters the field for research. The concept of positionality is concerned with the 'baggage' that the researcher carries with him/her when he or she is doing research. Every researcher has his/her worldview, personal experiences, political preference, expectations and upbringing and these things are inherently part of how researcher sees and engages with the world. All these factors (and many more) shape who the researcher is and how he/she conducts and interprets research. Many geographers (especially with a feminist background) have written about the far reaching influence that positionality has on the researcher and urge researchers to take their positionality into account (see England 1994; Rose 1997; Gold 2002; Kusek & Smiley 2014). Having positionality is unavoidable and is an inherent aspect of qualitative research but researchers have to reflect on their positionality and the researcher should acknowledge where he/she coming from, what his/her previous experiences are and how this might influence them. They need to acknowledge the presence of positionality within them and that this will influence them. Therefore, scholars have suggested that researchers should include a statement about their positionality in their studies (McDowell 1992, p409). Researchers will never be able to become neutral, objective or without any assumptions and instead researchers need to be reflective and always remind themselves of their own positionality. Being aware of your own positionality does not limit value of the research that is carried out but it rather provides new insights that can enrich the analysis.

4.7.4: Observations with Green Christian

The start of research with Green Christian was fairly straightforward. I had found out about an event with the MP from Cheltenham that Hope for the Future was organising in a local church in Cheltenham and which was specifically being advertised towards Christians who wanted to engage their MP about environmental issues. This event was very interesting as it seemed to be a faith-based organisation that was explicitly getting involved in the political decision making surrounding environmental issues. I emailed the organisers and explained my intentions and I was welcome to join the event. Subsequently, the people leading Hope for the Future introduced me to the leadership of Green Christian and I was able to meet them. The leadership of Green Christian gave me access to their

organisation and I was able to attend and observe their events and use their member base to approach people for interviews and questionnaires. I even became an official member. As such the first faith-based organisation that I approached for my research was immediately willing to let me do my research within their organisation and there no long search for a suitable candidate. Within Green Christian I attended numerous events, talked informally to numerous people, arranged times for interviews and collected all kinds of documents. I was also able to attend a steering committee meeting and the annual members meeting. These events took place throughout the country. Although a substantial number took place in Central London. During these talks, events and meetings I was able to develop a better understanding about Green Christian and the role it played in the life of its members.

Green Christian is an organisation completely run by volunteers. As such there is no office where you can walk in and start doing observations. Volunteers work from home and only meet several times per year to discuss things like membership numbers, finance and plans for the coming year. The total number of events that Green Christian organises each year is fairly small (as a whole Green Christian is a fairly small organisation) and as such it was not possible to long term 'in house' observation. Rather than one continuous participant observation I had to do many one off participant observation that usually lasted from one afternoon up to a whole weekend. In total I visited 16 Green Christian related activities over the course of almost three years. Many were organised by Green Christian but some were co-organised with other organisations like A Rocha and some were organised by other organisation but members from Green Christian were also in attendance. As such it might sound like it is difficult to become an 'insider' or at least better known within Green Christian. But the active 'core' of Green Christian is very small and most attendees to the different events already knew each (and also me after a while). There was not really a struggle to become part or involved in Green Christian. Most people would introduce themselves to me by telling where they lived and what church they attended and how they were involved in environmental issues. I then in return would do the same and tell them that I was a PhD student from Exeter whose research focused on how Christians engage with the environment and that I was conducting research with Green Christian. I also told them that I attended an Evangelical Anglican Church and that I was interesting in finding out how I could generate more interest in my church for the environment. The attendees would then reply by showing their interest and tell me that from their own experience making churchgoers more interested in the environment is very hard. But such simple and brief opening conversations also created immediately a sort of bond between me and the other attendees because everyone involved with Green Christian is seeking to make his/her church more interested in environment issues. As such I was not merely a researcher but also perceived as someone who shared

the values of Green Christian. Consequence of this situation was also that during informal conservation people would frequently complain about their own church and tell me how slow their church was on picking up on environmental issues.

When undertaking participant observations during activities of Green Christian I would always introduce myself as a researcher and that tell them that I was conducting research but that they should feel no pressure to be part of my research and that I was also willing to leave them outside my research. I also always brought consent forms with me for people to read if they wanted to have more details. During the first several activities and during the longer retreat the leadership of Green Christian also made explicit announcements of my presence at the start of the activities. But after several events most people already knew me. During the activities I always wrote down notes about what was being said during these activities, who was attending, how people interacted with each other and the discussion that took place among participants. I also had informal conversations with people. Often these conversations would start with what they thought about the talk or why they attended Green Christian activities. Such conversations often took place over coffee, tea or lunch. Often people talked about the aspects that they liked or found interest about Green Christian and they also often contrasted Green Christian with their own church (a comparison that often wasn't favourable for their own church). Conversations did not only focus on church or Green Christian but also about topics like public transport, living a vegetarian lifestyle and gardening or thing like grandchildren and holidays. Also, politics was an often discussed topic. During my work with Green Christian the Brexit vote happened, Theresa May won a general election and Donald Trump was elected as president of USA and all these things were extensively discussed among people who were attending the Green Christian events. I also joined them in the pub after the activity had ended. During the events many leaflets, flyers and documents were also handed out which also contained much interesting information. On my way back home on the bus or train I would also write out some notes about the general characteristics of the event, where it took place, how many were attending and the general atmosphere during the event. I also wrote about interesting things that took place during the event and relevant conversation with attendees that I had.

4.7.5: In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews are a very well-known research method throughout the social sciences. There is a long list of textbooks that seeks to explain to students and researcher how they can best interview people (see for example……) In-depth interviews, also called 'the long interview' (McCracken 1988), focus on the individual and allows his personal perceptions, feelings and experiences to be on the foreground. In-depth interviews are not meant to explore the opinions of a large group in society and findings from in-depth interviews cannot be generalised to a

wider population. However, they do allow the researcher '*into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world'* (McCracken (1988, p2)[19]. As such qualitative researchers have found in-depth interviews incredibly valuable when doing research. But it has to be acknowledged that in-depth interviews are prone to becoming a one way conversation with the interviewer holding most power during the interview and having the ability to steer the interview into the direction that he/she prefers and this should avoided as much as possible (Nunkoosing 2005; Anyan 2013). Also just as the participant observations, the positionality of the researcher does influence the interview process and analysis of the results.

Within human geography in-depth interviews are probably one of the most used research methods. The usage of in-depth interviews as a research tool is very diverse among human geographers. For example Lager et al (2013) used in-depth interviews to study how elderly people experience and negotiate neighbourhood renewal in their everyday life while Karsten (2003) used in-depth interviews to understand how parents seek to combine living the central areas of the city with raising children and building a career and Pinkster & Droogleever Fortuijn (2009) used in-depth interview to study the parental perceptions and strategies to counter risks for children in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. Other topics that have studied by human geographers with the use of in-depth interviews include the experience of families with poor public education provision (Nethercote 2017), The experiences of undergraduate students while living out their Christian identity at university (Sharma & Guest 2013) and Barr & Pollard (2017) used in-depth interviews to uncover the 'dynamic and complex coalescence of competing narratives' that are present within the transition movement. All the studies just mentioned above use in-depth interviews to uncover experiences, perceptions and feelings that are present among their participants and which help scholars to better understand the subject that they are studying. This also the goal the in-depth interviews for this thesis. Media, activists and academics are really enthusiastic about the potential of religion but no one has yet talk with the believers themselves and about their experiences and motivations or how they seek to engage other Christians and also the wider secular green movement with their message. As such the in-depth interviews for this thesis seek to fill in this gap and try to understand how environmentally concerned Christians live out and experience what they really care about.

The participants for the in-depth interviews were members of the Green Christian steering committee and participants who had indicated on the questionnaire that

[19] McCracken (1988) is a book but for the purpose of this thesis an electronic copy was downloaded from the website http://methods.sagepub.com/ Page numbering will be different from hard copies.

they were willing to participate in an interview. I also had in-depth interviews with leaders of secular environmental groups in the Exeter area. These groups were approached through contacts of my supervisors. Through the questionnaire I found in total 50 people who were willing to be interviewed. In the end I had in total 25 in-depth interviews with participants who came from Green Christian or respondents who had indicated their willingness in the questionnaire. The members of steering committee were approached through the chair of the steering committee. Making a selection out of the 50 respondents wasn't easy but as all the 50 respondents came with a filled in questionnaire attached to their name I tried to select a variety of different ages, theological backgrounds and political preferences. The questionnaire gave me lots of tools to select participants based on information that would have been inaccessible to me if I had approached all my respondents in person first. The decision to recruit participants through the questionnaire was made because the goal of these interview was not to get a better understanding of Green Christian as an organisation but rather to better understand the individual participant and understand and critically analyse his/her or her motivations, experiences and involvement in FBO's like Green Christian but also in other secular organisations and in their own churches. The focus was on the person and his ideas and experiences rather than Green Christian (during some interviews Green Christian was barely mentioned). As such I wanted not only to recruit active members of Green Christian but also more nominal members who might be sympathetic to Green Christian but who are also active in other FBO's and/or secular organisations. The goal was to have in-depth interviews with environmentally concerned Christians about their faith, how they became interested and involved in environmental issues, their involvement in secular organisations and their experiences in their own church. Due to the fact that that Green Christian is a national organisation and because many participants were recruited through a questionnaire, participants lived throughout the UK. Therefore, doing the interviews in person was not possible and instead Skype and phone calls with a landline were used to conduct the interviews. However, research has found that there are no differences between face to face and telephone interviews in terms of quality or findings (Sturges & Hanrahan 2004; Novick 2008; Irvine et al 2012; Vogl 2013; Saura & Balsas 2013). Research on the use of Skype (or other online video services) in relation to conducting interviews is sparse but the existing research suggests that there no problem with doing interviews over Skype instead of face to face interviews as long as the internet and other electronics devices are working well (Deakin & Wakefield 2014; Janghorban et al 2014; Seitz 2016). All these phone and Skype interviews lasted from in most cases between 40 minutes and 1 hour. There was one interview that lasted 30 minutes and several interviews that lasted for just under 1, 5 hours. All the interviews were taped with permission from the participant. The interviews focused on several themes. Firstly, there was a focus on how people got interested and involved in environmental issues and

Green Christian. Secondly, there was attention to the theological underpinnings of their environmental concern. Thirdly, we talked about their experiences in church and secular environmental groups and lastly, we talked about the commonalities and shared agendas of faith-based groups and secular groups with regards to environmental issues.

4.8: Positionality

My own involvement within the field of religion and the environment came only fairly recently. When I started my PhD in Exeter I already knew that my research would focus on postsecularity and how secular and religious are collaborating on shared concerns, but I hadn't decided yet in relation to which issue I wanted to study it. But then I read in the newspaper 'The Independent' (still paper copy back then) an article under the headline *'Scientists call on God to save the Planet'* (Bawden 2014). This article talked about climate scientists and the Vatican coming together to discuss about climate change. It sparked my interest in whether environmental issues might be an interesting direction to take the research. But at the same time, I was also rather sceptical about the possibility that religion could add something positive to the addressing of environmental problems. My parents raised me and my sister as Christians and sent us to Christian schools and we are lifelong members of Reformed Church Liberated in the Netherlands (Gereformeerde Kerk Vrijgemaakt, GKV)[20]. At the same time, they also often eat vegetarian and always buy organic food and have their own vegetable garden, are members of environmental groups, cycle each day and make lots of walks through nature. However, these things are never related to their Christian faith and the things seemed to be rather distant from each other. The only times that nature and religion were related was when my mother wanted to skip the afternoon church service and go for a walk instead. She would then say that rather than going to church she would go out and admire God's creation[21]. So, for me although familiar with ideas like stewardship and caring for creation, they remained rather distant theological concept that didn't spur me or my family into action. When Pope Francis published his encyclical 'Laudato Si' it only strengthened my scepticism because all the discussions and disagreements that followed after the publication very neatly followed the ideological divides in the UK and elsewhere and theological discussions seemed to be merely a side line (see also chapter two). As such it seemed like the discussions were little different from more secular

[20] There are no English books about the Reformed Church Liberated. The only English source is the Wikipedia page https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reformed_Churches_in_the_Netherlands_(Liberated). Although being a bit dated (in contrary of what the Wikipedia page says women are allowed to become ministers nowadays) it is the best English language source available.

[21] An American study indeed found that 'countries with higher levels of natural amenities (beautiful landscapes and good weather) have lower rates of adherence to traditional religious organizations' (see Ferguson & Tamburello 2015).

discussions and followed the secular narratives and discourses about science, ideology and politics that were being put forward by the various elites from both sides of the argument. Also, while reading the existing literature I found much work that was very hopeful about the potential and all the resources that religion could offer to the addressing of various environmental problems but such studies also lacked much needed empirical proof. Whether there was any success with putting such ideas into action at church level remained unclear and I read that as a warning sign. As I continued reading I also read empirical studies like Douglas (2009), Lawson & Miller (2011), Delashmutt (2011), Kohrsen (2015) and all the quantitative studies that all seem to contradict such positive depictions. In the end my position before starting my fieldwork can be summarised with a quote from the overview article by Taylor et al (2016b):

Notwithstanding the increasing number of statements issued by religious institutions, leaders, and activist laypeople, there has not been a groundswell of politically influential religious environmentalism.

(p349)

So, when I started by fieldwork I was rather sceptical about the role of religion and was expecting environmentally concerned Christians to be first and foremost influenced other more secular factors, like political ideology, believe in science and their upbringing. In my mind religion would be something that had just jumped on an already existing ideological bandwagon. As such when I was starting my research I was really intending on scraping away the religious and finding a sort of secular foundation that was vital for any faith based environmental concern. In many ways this turned out to be true during my fieldwork. The vast majority of the environmentally concerned Christians are indeed left wing, people were very explicit in their dislike of right wing politics, and their concerns for the environment often started at a very young age or at university rather than in church and climate science was often mentioned first when they talked about their motivations. However, after some time of working with environmentally concerned Christians there was also a realisation that faith was more than a coating over an ideological and scientific framework. This best illustrated an example. Within Green Christian there has been attention for a different interpretation for John 3.16, one of the best known verses from the bible. Rather than the traditional '*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life'* Green Christian members are encouraged to read to original Greek version that uses the word 'Cosmos' (κοσμον)rather than 'world'. The word cosmos implies that God not just loved the humans but also animals, plants, insects and everything else. So, one of most important bible texts does not only speak about the love of God to humans but also the love of God for everything else that lives. This was very important for the members of Green Christian and

made them realise that their concerns were central to Christianity and were much more than just ideological preferences and as such that their environmental concerns were embedded within their faith. Of course, ideology and science are still very important and indeed are still very central to most environmentally concerned Christians but these secular reasons will always be opposed, dismissed and disputed by others. They are somewhat loose sets of arguments that struggle to make the case for commitment or provide encouragement. With faith-based concerns it is different and for environmentally concerned Christians their faith forms a cement that strengthens and forms an extra layer of commitment around the existing secular arguments. Even when fellow churchgoers ignore their calls for action and nothing seems to happen they still can find strength in the idea that it is not some ideological agenda that they follow but rather a central teaching of their faith. Science, ideology and faith together make these Christians deeply committed. Science and ideology might be able to provide really important input, but faith brings the different parts together and provides continuing motivation. But it needs to be emphasised that this linking up of faith with science and ideology is an ongoing process among environmentally concerned Christians. Green Christian is a place where people learn about such things and were people can meet similar minded people. People already know the science and are already deeply committed to environmental issues and are also often already committed Christians but what Green Christian is seeking to do is strengthening environmental concern and commitment by linking faith up with the secular aspects of environmental issues. This explicit linking up of personal faith and environmental issues is something novel for many people. During my time with Green Christians I also discovered sides of Christianity that relates much closer to the environment than I had previously thought. The cosmos interpretation of the famous John 3.16 verse was also for me something new and I was surprised that there was green side to this famous bible verse. However, I also think that, as the empirical chapters will demonstrate, the existence of any kind of link between faith and environmental concern, sustainable behaviour or willingness address climate change is not easy to make and faith by itself is unlikely to make people ‘green’. The expectations about faith-based input in relation to relation to addressing environmental problems seems so high, despite the ongoing political disagreement around climate change and the ongoing decline of institutionalised Christianity, that disappointment will almost seem inevitable.

4.9: Insider/outsider

Doing research as a Christian within a Christian organisation does give a certain insider status as you are familiar with many of the assumptions, practices and feelings that participants have, and you often understand why people certain things or reach certain conclusions. Also, many people that I met during Green Christian events or while conducting interviews assumed by default that I was a Christian as

well. It seemed that for them somebody researching Green Christian had to be a Christian as well. Downside of this of course that because these participants assumed that I knew what they were talking about, they tended to skip over their basic faith tenants or talked about them in only very abstract terms while if I had been a non-Christian they might have giving me a much more in-depth and explanatory answers. Another downside was that because I belong to a specific denomination that is associated with a specific theology it was often quite difficult to not let your own background influence the way that you asked questions or let it influence the way that you analysed answers. At the start, I often found myself assuming that my own Evangelical/Calvinist way, as I had learned it at school and church, would be the norm and answers that deviated from this norm were minority opinions. I was aware that is would not be the case but after a whole life in an environment in which such views dominate it is quite hard to completely eliminate them.

Researchers will always remain to some extent an outsider because he/she is new to the organisation and attempts to understand (which is an odd thing to do in the first place) rather than merely participate in it. However, within Green Christian participants actively tried to make me feel as much insider as possible. This was because within Green Christian I was often by far the youngest participant and Green Christian is trying its best to attract younger people. As such, they encouraged me to bring friends to Green Christian events and even made me a member of Green Christian without explicitly asking me first. However, such behaviour could potentially also lead to a situation in which members of Green Christian present a more positive picture than is reality. There were also quite a few people at Green Christian who were very happy to send me resources that they thought might help me to engage my own church on environmental issues. The age gap didn't seem to pose many problems as the people perceived me to be a Christian who cared about the environment, just like them rather than some inexperienced student who lacked the knowledge to understand their feelings, but it might well be the case that I missed some feelings, expressions of emotions or behaviour due to age difference. In the end several scholars have claimed that having a Christian background while studying Christianity is a benefit rather than a drawback (see Howell 2007; Harding 1991; Marsden 1997).

4.10: Ethics

The research that was conducted for this thesis has been fully approved by Geography department of the University of Exeter. During the entire research process, I tried to be as open as possible about my findings and progress and tried to share with participants the ways in which I was using their contributions. Before taking part in the research, participants were sent a consent form and asked to read it. Because most interviews took place by phone or Skype it was difficult to

get a signature on a hardcopy of the consent form but before I would start the interview I would always ask participants if they had read the form and whether they were still happy to participate. People were always free to refuse to participate, refuse to answer specific questions or withdraw without giving any reason from the interviews. Interviews were taped with permission from the participant. Participants always remained anonymous unless they explicitly said otherwise and the recordings, transcripts and codings of the interviews were always safely stored behind passwords on hard drives and the University storage cloud. Because focus groups involve groups of participants some things were a bit different. The focus groups were set up with the help of individuals who were active within the specific churches and who were interested in helping me set up a focus group. They approached people to participate and arranged a time and venue. I communicated with this individual and explained the consent form to him or her. At the start of the focus group I discussed the consent form with the participants prior to the focus group and asked if they were still happy to participate. During the participant observations, my presence during events was announced by the organisations some time ahead of the event itself and before the event would start the organisers would tell everybody present at the event about me and I was also given the opportunity to say something. For the participant observations I had also consent forms which I distributed among participants. It was impossible to get explicit consent from all the participants, but people were free to express their desire to be excluded from my research, which I always respected. While conducting the research there no ethical dilemmas. Many participants had done dissertation research themselves and some had also written PhD theses and as such knew very well what participating in academic research entailed. Some also said that their own struggle to find participants when they were students was partly the reason why they joined. All the consent forms can be found in the appendix 4.

However, because religion is not only public or political but also very personal and intimate, participant observations also captured people' feelings and emotions during moments which in which they were vulnerable. These moments included things like personal prayers, sharing the Eucharist, meditation or sharing (emotional) personal stories about religious experiences or personal struggles in church with other participants. At such moments people had really make themselves vulnerable to others and some people did expressed some concern about whether my presence during such religious activities was desirable as they were afraid that my presence would make people more hesitant to share their personal feelings. This concern was mostly put forward by the speaker at the Green Christian retreat. In the end it wasn't a problem for the speaker and I could freely attend the retreat and people never objected to my presence. Overall there were no access problems during my time at Green Christian. Although much older than me, most members and supporters of Green Christian were just like me highly

educated, came from a good social background and had up to now not faced major difficulties in their lives and just tried to be involved in causes about which they personally deeply cared. As such there were many commonalities and little differences between me and the members and supporters of Green Christian.

4.11: Conclusion

This chapter briefly outlined the used methodology of this thesis. The goal of this thesis is to go beyond calls for action and the acknowledgement of possibilities for collaboration and understand how believers engage with the environment and how they collaborate with secular environmental groups. For this goal the thesis will focus on churches in the Exeter area and a national faith-based environmental group called Green Christian and it will use a more qualitative oriented methodology. To further strengthen this thesis a survey was also distributed through the Green Christian newsletter and interviews with the leadership of two Exeter area environmental groups were conducted. Below is a schematic overview of the research question, the used methods and the chapter that will discuss them.

Research question	**Research Methods used**	**Chapter**
How do churchgoers relate and engage with the environment and how is this relationship turned into action?	Focus groups and in-depth interviews	Chapter 5
How do environmentally concerned Christians relate and engage with the environment and how is this relationship turned into action? And in what ways is this different compared with 'ordinary churchgoers'?	In-depth interviews; Survey; Participant observations with Green Christian	Chapter 6
What difficulties are environmentally concerned Christians experiencing? And how are environmentally concerned Christians finding a shared concern for the environment with their fellow believers?	In-depth interviews; Survey; Participant observations with Green Christian	Chapter 6
How are environmentally concerned believers finding common ground with secular groups and how do they collaborate with each other? And to what extent are secular groups willing to give space to faith-based motivation?	In-depth interviews with environmentally concerned Christians and leaders of secular groups; Survey	Chapter 7

Table 1: Overview Research questions and methods

As the scheme above shows, this thesis will be using focus groups, in-depth interviews, a survey and participant observations for its data gathering. However, as explained in this chapter, although I was raised in a Christian home and my family was environmentally conscious, there was never any explicit link between faith and the environment and combined with the scepticism that I found in the existing literature that researched the links between faith and the environment I

became rather sceptical about the ability of religion to be able to make any lasting change on the ways that believers interact with the environment. But I also think, and I will also explain in the upcoming empirical chapters that this scepticism is also justified. While conducting research there were no difficult struggles with access or ethics and the ageing member base of Green Christian was very happy to welcome a seemingly young researcher within their organisation. However, despite little actual problems I had to remind myself to also fully accept and equally value the faith expressions that might have seem quite far removed from what I'm used to within my own Christian life.

Chapter 5:
Churches and the environment:

Linking faith up with the environment and putting it into action

5.1: Introduction

This chapter will discuss and analyse the ways in which a specific set of churches in and around Exeter engage with the environment. It focuses on the (eco) theology that these churches adhere and how this shapes the ways in which these churches perceive the environment. The chapter also seeks to understand how their theology spurs people into action and how it is combined with other non-theological incentives to engage with the environment. As such this chapter goal is to answer the first sub-research question, namely, *'How do churchgoers relate and engage with the environment and how is this relationship turned into action?'*

The engagements with the environment by specific faith leaders are well-known and have been extensively covered by media and have caused academics and environmental activists to be increasingly enthusiastic about the possible contributions of faith-based groups (see also chapter 1). As already discussed in chapter 3 there are very few empirical studies that focus on how local churches relate and engage with the environment. Beyond the specific eco-theology and environmental concerns of a handful of well-known faith leaders little known about how local churches see the environment in relation to their theological convictions and what role these churches see for themselves in the addressing environmental problems. As discussed in chapter 2, as far as I'm aware there are only a handful of mostly American and Australian studies that focus on how churches engage with the environment (Douglas 2009; Lawson & Miller 2011; Delashmutt 2011; Wilkinson 2012 Peifer et al 2014). These studies focus on mainline congregations in Australia (Douglas 2009; Lawson & Miller 2011), Anglican churches in Cornwall, UK (Delashmutt 2011) and evangelical churches in the South of the USA (Wilkinson 2012) and two specific evangelical churches in the South West of the USA (Pfeifer et al 2014) and these studies have already been discussed in chapter 2. But what these studies have in common is that they depict churches often as struggling and failing to engage with the environment due to reasons like the presence of political ideologies that oppose environmental action, decline of institutionalised Christianity, lack of knowledge about the environment, statements from faith leaders that fail to reach local congregations and Evangelical theological beliefs that generate 'environmental apathy'. As such much of the existing literature is rather negative about engagement by local churches. Although, it has be mentioned that there is an anthropology PhD thesis by Crosby (2016) which studied four 'conservative evangelical' churches in Wales (UK) and which in contrast to the more pessimistic studies found that evangelical churches were able to develop more positive environmental attitudes by using theological approaches that were inspired by their Evangelical theology. However, studies that seek to understand how churches and 'ordinary' churchgoers engage with the environment within the European context as still very rare, with the Delashmutt (2011) and Crosby (2016) being the two exeptions.

It is in this still unexplored field of study where this fifth chapter of the thesis fits. As such the goal of this chapter is to make a start with understanding how local churches with the UK engage with the environment. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to do ground-truthing research in order to understand what is going on within churches in relation to the environment. Due to the nature of the research and the lack of existing research there is no existing theoretical framework or previous research that can be used during the research as such within this chapter the ground-truthing and exploratory element is very important. Within this chapter there will be attention to the negative aspects that come with the polarisation around environmental issues and decline of institutionalised Christianity, but it will also include findings that show how biblical ideas can inspire a desire to care and protect the environment.

5.2: Outline of the arguments

5.2.1: Failing stewards

What will follow now is an outline of the chapter. First there will a discussion of the theologies that these churches apply towards the environment. In this section it will be argued that all the participating churches see the environment as something important and relevant to their faith. But they also say that as individuals, as churches and also as part of the wider society they have failed to care and protect the environment sufficiently. Often these arguments are embedded in stewardship language whereby believers are seen as having a faith-based responsibility to care for the environment to but have failed to take this responsibility seriously.

5.2.2: Caring for Justice, God and the interconnectedness with the planet.

However, secondly, it will be argued that stewardship also remains a distant and static concept. During discussions about why participants felt compelled to act they would often refer caring for others, helping the poor and loving neighbours. They strongly emphasise the human tragedies and the injustice that sit below environmental problems. For many non-Evangelicals, stewardship is an Old Testament concept that didn't really inspire them. During the focus groups both Methodists and Catholics would express the view that the Bible doesn't tell so much about the environment, especially in the New Testament, it is a human story about salvation where the environment plays only a small part. But for them the bible does tell lots more about caring for others and this 'caring for others' aspect was very frequently mentioned when talking about environment problems. Also, all the participating churches, including Evangelical, argued that the cause of environmental problems is to be found within the human greed and selfishness. Also, the 'consumer driven society' and the focus on economic growth are often

blamed. The Evangelical approach is somewhat different compared to the other churches. Evangelicals don't disregard the stewardship approach, for them stewardship doesn't mean that humans are in charge but rather that God is in charge. Participants from all churches often explain personal commitment and involvement in terms of caring for others and seeking justice, especially for the poor and future generations. The more liberal Anglicans didn't use stewardship all together and instead favoured emphasising the interconnectedness of nature by arguing that everything including humans is connected with each other. They often made connections with evolutionary thinking. As the only participating church in the study they abandoned the idea that humans are standing apart/above the rest of creation. Apart from the Evangelical Anglican Church, all participating churches saw caring for the environment as something that doesn't require specific Christian morals or ethics. For them people from other faiths or no faiths can care just as well for the environment, the Christian faith is not unique in its ability to stir up environmental concern.

5.2.3: Struggle to go beyond individual behaviour

Thirdly, when the participating churches were talking about the actions that they were taking or willing to take it was often restricted to individual behaviour. Participants were very much willing to reduce water usage, take public transport more often or recycle but although they did saw environmental problems as needing a collective response, all taken and proposed actions focused on individual behaviour. This also continued after they were challenged on this fact. Many participants from across the participating churches emphasised personal responsibility and struggled going beyond it. Some also felt that environmental problems needed individual lifestyle changes and political solutions and that there was very little in between these individual and political approaches and as such there was very little room for churches get involved. Participants seemed stuck in focusing on improving individual behaviour and (inter)national politics. The Liberal Anglican church was different. From the start they argued that individual behaviour on its own wasn't sufficient, and that people have to work together. They made political statements and blamed political parties and certain ideologies for environmental inaction, but they also struggled with putting their concerns into action beyond the individual. Within the eco-church there was much more attention for the environment during church services and other church led activities but also here there was a struggle to go beyond individual actions. This problem was acknowledged but also, here the problem was that the eco-church didn't have a solution for it. Perhaps without realising it the Evangelical Anglican Church was the only participating church that had come up with a solution. The possibility of starting a vegetable garden gave them the opportunity to work collectively on environmental issues and step away from the strong focus on individual behaviour. The chapter will also discuss how churches can move away from the current focus

on individual behaviour and how postsecular rapprochement might help by that. Finally, there will a conclusion to this chapter.

5.3: Labelling theology

Before continuing with the rest of this chapter it is important to explain the labels that will be used. Believers within the UK and the rest of the world adhere to different theologies and belong to different denominations and therefore many studies, reports and books but also non-academic publications and believers themselves use well-known labels like Anglican, Methodist, Catholic or Baptist. Such labels are often self-identified and all participants indicated that they see themselves as for example Catholic or Methodist and using such labels is no problem, although the official theological definition of Methodist or Catholic theology might be very different from the definition that is used by 'ordinary' churchgoers. Also, all churches that were part of the focus groups would identify with a particular theology or denomination on their website. However, it becomes more problematic when labels like conservative Catholic or fundamentalist Baptist are being used as such labels position believers along a liberal/conservative scale and because they also often imply that certain political and economic views. This is especially the case with the term 'Evangelical'. Within the chapter the two controversial labels that will be used are 'Evangelical' and 'Liberal Anglican'. The term evangelical applies to a very wide variety of Protestant Christians that ranges from Pentecostal Christians in Ghana who dance and celebrate to strict Calvinists in Scotland and the Netherlands whose church services are sober and void of much celebration and who put strong emphasis on the sinful nature of humans. However, despite the diversity, all the different branches of Evangelical theology have three things in common. Firstly, all Evangelicals share the belief that the bible is the true and infallible word of God and that as such no concessions to its interpretation can be made. Secondly, Evangelicals see a need to have a personal relationship with Jesus as a central aspect of their theology and lastly, Evangelicals put a strong emphasis on evangelism and argue that Christians are required to spread Christianity among those who are not Christians (for more on Evangelical theology see also Bebbington 1993; Hutchinson & Wolffe 2012; Harris 2008**;** Vermeer 2015). Evangelical churches, especially the charismatic/Pentecostal branches, have often been depicted as escaping the decline that affects much of institutionalised Christianity in Europe and North America. Several studies have pointed at the conservative theology that Evangelicals adhere as an important reason why many Evangelical churches seem to escape decline (Haskell et al 2016; Iannaccone 1994; Kelley 1978; Burgoyne et al 2017; Vermeer & Scheepers 2017a; Thomas & Olson 2010) but others have argued that many members of growing Evangelical churches are not converts but rather Christians who have left declining mainstream churches to join growing and more appealing Evangelical churches. As such growing Evangelical churches are just a 'circulation of the

saints' from non-Evangelical churches to Evangelical churches (Bibby & Brinkerhoff 1973; Vermeer & Scheepers 2017b; Bibby & Brinkerhoff 1994; Perrin et al 1997). Within this thesis the term evangelical is used to describe participants of a charismatic church which was part of the Church of England and participants of an independent charismatic church that had been awarded an Eco church bronze award. The leadership of these churches explicitly mentioned the Evangelical identity of their church, but many other participants did not. However, participants did often emphasise the core principles of Evangelical theology such as a strong belief in the infallibility of the bible and a need for a personal relationship with Jesus. The term Liberal Anglican was used to describe to participants from an Anglican church who were much less theologically conservative. It could be argued that this church is 'mainstream' rather than liberal but although they didn't call themselves liberal they did explicitly mention and reject Evangelical ideas and emphasised that they didn't believe in clear and strictly defined theological rules. Instead for these participants there were many possible explanations and interpretations of the bible and they avoided making dogmatic statements about God, Jesus or other teachings which many other Christians might be perceived as unshakable Christian truths, including for non-Evangelicals. For these liberal Anglicans the Christian faiths was more about putting Christian ethics about caring for the poor or the environment into practice rather than adhering to the 'correct' theology or seeking to convert others and such characteristics have often been associated with liberal Protestantism (see also Chapman 2002; Michaelsen & Roof 1986**;** Hodgson 2010). They also went a lot further in putting aside classical Christian concepts about the environment like stewardship or creation care and replaced it with the more pantheist notion of 'interconnectedness'. However, they also consistently described themselves as Anglican, something the participants from the Evangelical Anglican church, although also part of the Church of England never did. In the end the label Liberal Anglican was chosen to reflect the much more theologically liberal nature of their Christian faith. It is important to emphasise that these labels reflect theological positions and do not necessarily reflect wider socio-political positions of the involved churches.

5.4: Describing participants

This chapter will work with findings from the focus groups. Within this chapter the participants will be quoted by using their denomination, gender and an assigned number. This simple way of describing the participants was chosen because firstly, with focus groups the focus is on the group interaction and the group dynamics rather than in-depth insights into personal values and commitments (Morgan 2011; Morgan 2010; Farnsworth & Boon 2010; Moen et al 2010) and because the focus of this chapter is on understanding the approach towards the environment by the church as a whole rather than individuals. The second reason was that because the focus groups consisted of quite large groups of people details such as age,

educational level and job were often unknown. An additional reason was that the participants of focus groups were often rather homogenous (mostly white British, retired/close to retirement, active churchgoer and long term/lifelong residents of Exeter) and as such putting in lots of extra details wouldn't add much extra insight because most participants would still have looked very similar (the Anglican Evangelical church being the exemption as they were on average younger). It needs to be emphasised although gender was used to differentiate between participants, there were no gender-based differences between participants of the focus groups. The church leaders who participated in the focus groups did not get a number but were instead quoted by using their leadership position (for example priest or group leader[22]). As the data used in this chapter comes from focus groups this chapter will also include several longer quotes from discussions that took place during the focus groups to demonstrate that particular findings that are being discussed are not a feeling or experience from a specific participant but rather reflect the opinion of the entire group (or at least a substantial part of the group). In appendix 5 there will be a list of the different churches and a description of the participants.

5.5: Churches and the environment

The now following sections of the chapter will unpack how churches engage with the environment by using the findings from the focus groups. It will start by outlining how the ideas of being a good stewardship and the requirement of God to care for His creation are used to make a theological case to protect the environment and how environmental problems are being framed as a failure to be good stewards. But it will also show that non-Evangelical churches often use justice-oriented approaches to the environment that focus on the human tragedies that occur due to environmental problems and that liberal Anglicans prefer a much more bio centric approach that emphasises the interconnectedness between humans and nature. The following sections will focus on the theology and arguments that the participating churches put forward, not so much the actual practice. That will come in a later section.

5.5.1: Relating theology to the environment

All the different churches that took part in the focus groups expressed a desire to care and protect the natural environment and all the participants supported the idea that nature is special and has intrinsic value that extends beyond its usefulness for humans. Nature is something beautiful and essential for life but also

[22] All focus groups, apart from the Methodists, had a leader who was acknowledged by other participants as leading their church and who had at least substantial authority within the group.

something precious and vulnerable that humans can easily damage or destroy[23]. Protecting the environment is often described as important commandment that God has given to believers. *'God has given the world and made us custodians and has given us responsibility to look after it'* as an active male member of the eco-church in clear stewardship language states.

However, despite this religious incentive to care for the environment all the participating churches also argued that believers have failed value and protect the environment and instead have abused and destroyed it. Following up on an expression of support for the idea of stewardship by female Catholic who was very much concerned about the state of the planet, the Catholic priest of the church argued:

'The whole thing is created by God. So as (name X) said we are trustees or stewards of what we have been given. But we also have the challenge to care for it, to look after it. We have neglected it as Christians, as faithful people. We said that for somebody else to do deal with or we've got to deal with our faith'

Catholic priest

So, although the Catholic priest supports for the idea that humans are stewards above the rest of nature, there is also an acknowledgement that believers have failed be good stewards. The way that believers have treated the environment was not in accordance with what God commanded them to do. In a similar way the group leader of the Anglican Evangelical church argued:

I was just reading a bit in Genesis right at the start where it says:
And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1, verse 24 & 25)

[23] Many participants in the focus groups use words like 'nature', 'the environment', 'the natural world' and also 'creation'. Such words will frequently appear in this thesis and with these words participants try to grasp the range, beauty and diversity of the biophysical environment and it includes virtually all things from the local park, grass along the motorway or flowers on a balcony to a national park far away that is full of rare and endangered plants and animals. Words like environment, creation and nature are used to describe the physical world and the atmosphere but it is also used to emphasise that everything created by God.

A lot of it we have kind of ruined, haven't we? As (Name X) said we kinda wiped out lots of forest, the sea we polluted and I think, God said, I gave it to you and it was good and you kind of trashed a lot of it.'

Group leader Anglican Evangelicals

For the Evangelical group leader but also others in the Evangelical focus group it was very clear that environmental problems like air pollution or deforestation displayed a failure to adhere to the principles of stewardship and that Christians were supposed to do much better. Another male evangelical participant argued *'The way He (God) made it and He was really happy with it and it was good but unfortunately it didn't remain in that state'* (Male Evangelical 2). But also, participants from across the other churches often cited greed, selfishness and a materialistic worldview as causing believers to ignore the call to care for creation and rather abuse it for their own benefit (more on that later in this chapter).

5.5.2: Caring for others instead of stewardship

However, as the following section will show, this traditional description of stewardship and responsibility for creation was also criticised by the participating non-Evangelical participants as lacking foundation within the New Testament and leaving out the strong incentive to care for others, a theme that can be found throughout the bible. Catholic, Methodist and Liberal Anglican participants all felt that stewardship wasn't cutting it for them. It remained a rather distant concept that didn't reflect their concerns for people, especially those in in third world countries who are being disproportionally affected by the consequences of environmental issues. Both Methodist and Catholic participants see a stronger case for caring for the environment through the ideas of 'loving your neighbour' and 'caring for others'. During the Methodist focus group there was among the participants a feeling that stewardship wasn't really up to the job of making people care about the environment and that in general the bible didn't say very much about the environment. Trying to get a discussion started about this problem, a lifelong male Methodist who was 'born and bred' in Exeter asked the group:

'Does the bible actually say an awful lot about the environment? I mean, it is about loving people and spiritual dimensions of things….. but they didn't really live in a time with ecological problems, really… Did Jesus directly say anything about the environment? I just throw it out as a question….'

Male Methodist 2

Other participants of the Methodist focus group seemed to share his concerns and confirmed his suspicion and they too felt that within the bible the strongest incentive to care for the environment came through the demand to care for other

people in need. For example, another male Methodist argued that for him the motivation to address environmental problem came from a desire to be *'loving your neighbours as yourself'* (Male Methodist 5) as environmental problems always affect the poorest the worst. Similarly, a female Methodist referred to Matthew 25 verse 41-46 and argued about addressing environmental problems that *'indirectly, it is the where were you when I was hungry or something or naked. That sort of thing'* (Female Methodist 3). Another male participant tried to come up with bible stories that could be linked to environmental problems but found it hard to come up with stories and about the story that he and other participants came up with, the story of Joseph, he said: *'but we tend not to read those stories in those sorts of terms, do we?* (Male Methodist 1). As such, coming back to his own question the earlier mentioned male Methodist answered his own question by saying:

'I don't think the case is strong from the bible you can sort of see there are some places about creation and things like that and we should look after it but from a New Testament view, loving your neighbour and things like that. Firstly, it is a stronger motivation. I think if you think through the consequences of environmental catastrophe it is clear that a lot of people will be killed or severely disadvantaged or impoverished because of the devastation that that could cause.'

Male Methodist 2

The Methodist participants felt that the perspective of caring for others was for them a clearer incentive to care about the environment than stewardship. They felt that the bible did provide some ideas about creation, stewardship and responsibility but that overall the bible didn't put much emphasis on the environment. Instead they saw the strong focus of caring for others and especially those in need, which they argue is present throughout the bible and in particular in the New Testament, is a much better motivator. A focus on the human tragedies that are associated with environmental problems is for the Methodists a much stronger incentive. Protecting people from the consequences of environmental problems both now and in the future:

Because that's the rationale for doing something for the environment, isn't it? If it keeps going into this direction terrible things will happen to lots of people. And it's a sort of loving your neighbour in the future and that's a very different way of thinking oh…. there's a crisis in Sudan, we better do something about it.

Male Methodist 2

For the Methodist participants making environmental issues about the effects it has on humans and how there is great injustice in the consequences of environmental

problems, with those in poorer countries facing the bulk of the negative consequences, made addressing environmental issues for the Methodist participants seem more urgent and closer and personal for them compared with the rather distant and sometimes vague demand to be good stewards. This focus on the human aspects of environmental problems does not just focus on ongoing cases of flooding, drought or deforestation but is also focused on future problems as the participants wanted not only to help with current suffering but also prevent future suffering. As such reducing greenhouse gases or preventing exhausting natural resources were also deemed as necessary to prevent future problems. Another reason why the Methodists in the focus group preferred caring for others over stewardship was because within their church there was already a very well-established focus on justice and caring for the poor. A focus on human tragedies and injustice does not only provide a strong incentive but it also provides a familiar incentive. Many participants in the Methodist focus group argued that justice and caring for others is central to their belief

I would think in large by Methodism the environment isn't really centred upon during services at all. Things like social justice, social care…… Some of the immediate things like famine which of course is often about climate change and you see that all these things might come to bear and as a consequence we might think not only about how we might give money but also how do we care for the environment and what are our responsibilities. But there is more the social justice theme which comes out more strongly and more regularly and possibly more when we are thinking about more third world type of situations.

Male Methodist 1

A female participant from the Methodist Church agreed and said about justice:

It is very high on the agenda. Our teaching isn't just trying to better ourselves as a Christian. It's very much bettering ourselves and you know, it's in the way that we are thinking about how we affect one and other.

Female Methodist 1

Because issues around social justice and caring are already well-established within the Methodist church it is easier to align environmental concerns with issues around justice rather than trying to establish another theological perspective that might struggle to generate the same response or commitment as more justice-based approaches do. Aligning environmental issues with wider justice related struggles allowed the environment to become part of widely shared commitment to bring justice into the world. This justice focus did put a large emphasis on the human aspects of environmental problems but it also allowed it to be instantly

recognised as an urgent problem that required their attention. Another reason why participants from the Methodist church seem to prefer a justice focus was because at the *'time that the bible was written there weren't so called environmental issues in quite the same way' (Male Methodist 1).* Some Methodist participants also thought that in time that the bible was written there were not or not so much environmental problems, at least less problems that were caused by humans. As such for participating Methodists it felt like the bible wasn't perhaps up to the task of giving clear answers about what to do with issues like climate change or oceanic pollution. As such Methodist participants preferred a focus on caring for others as 'caring for creation' demanded very different things in ancient biblical times compared with the situation in the 21st century. Participating still found the bible was helpful and that it could provide useful insights about how to respond but no clear instructions as for what to do as might be the case with social issues like homelessness or refugees.

The Catholic participants were very similar to the Methodist participants. They as well preferred a focus on caring for others over the idea of stewardship. Similar to the Methodists they argued that within the New Testament most of the attention goes to caring and loving others and that the environment seems to be no more than a side note. During the focus group the Catholic priest argued:

I suppose the basic Genesis understanding of the garden, the Creation… That's Jewish, it's part of our tradition but it is actually specifically Jewish. If you're looking at the gospels, there is not an awful lot about the environment in the gospels in that sense. Jesus didn't go round making the environment better necessarily, he did with people, healings and stuff. But there is not that much about specific environment…

Catholic priest

Following this statement, a female participant of the Catholic focus group said:

You said Jesus focused on people. But isn't that really what we are talking about here, it's how to care. The world actually can feed everyone if it was used properly. And there are enough resources for everyone to be clothed, to have water, to have all these things but we don't share it. So, by focusing on the sharing and the care for others in our different ways we are almost trying to share the resources of the world and through that care for the environment.

Female Catholic 1

Also for the Catholic participants there was a feeling that the bible, especially in the New Testament wasn't saying much about the environment or how they should

protect it. According to a Catholic male who participated in the focus group, when it comes to the environment there aren't many *'provocative readings' (Male Catholic 1)*. Rather participants felt that throughout the bible there was a very strong focus on caring for others and sharing with those who have less. However, as said before it is important to emphasise that for both Catholic and Methodist participants caring for others means more can just sending aid to victims of flooding, droughts or other natural disasters. For participants caring for others also means that they had to prevent future problems and as such a call to care for others was also interpreted as call to reduce emissions, stop deforestation and help to protect biodiversity. As such for both Catholic and Methodist participants caring for others also means changing lifestyles as these are causing or will be causing problems in the future. A Male Methodist summarises this view by stating:

'If we have too much global warming, the ice caps melt, the sea level rise and actually the impact will be on a lot of people in poorer countries, Bangladesh for example, that will be pretty much entirely under water as far as I understand. And part of loving your neighbour is perhaps stopping an environmental catastrophe which would kill or severely disadvantage billions of people across the world'

Male Methodist 2

However, it is important to emphasise that this replacement of stewardship with caring for others was not immediately accepted by everyone. Among the Catholic participants nobody disagreed, although the priest and a female participant were the only ones talking during that part of the discussion. But among the Methodist participants some still found stewardship a helpful concept that would help them to articulate their responsibilities. After the male participant said that *'I don't think the case is strong from the bible'* (see also longer quote back on page 111) others came to the defence of the concept of stewardship although also they acknowledged that they too felt that the caring for other perspective was also motivating they also still felt that stewardship could provide incentive to care for the environment.

FM2[24]: *I wonder, even if it doesn't say anything so much about conservation or ecology but it says that God made the world. Is that not just…. God made the world therefore we must look after it.*
FM4: exactly..
MM1: It is his creation and not our, so we can't do what we want. In a sense the care in entrusted to us, it is a profound Christian, Judeo-Christian perception. What

[24] FM= Female Methodist MM= Male Methodist

comes from the New Testament is completely fine but it is a human view of it in a sense you know, whether you're a Christian or not, that sense what we must care for each other around the world and look after it for the future generations, is my human response as well as my Christian.

For them the idea that God had made the beautiful world in which they lived filled them with a sense of responsibility. God had made everything so well that for them there no doubt that they had protect and care for. Not because of human lives that were at risk but because 'God saw it was good….' (Genesis 1). Protecting something that is as grand and so diverse and precious as the planet is, was for these participants not only a command but also a privilege that God that entrusted them. Another point that they make it that they see stewardship was a concept that is not confined to Christian theology but as something that can be extended to any kind of belief there that is a creator. This overlap with other faiths is very important for several participating churches as will be seen later in this chapter and participants felt that is was important that incentives for caring and protection the environment were not only shared by fellow Christians but also by people with different faith background or no faith background.

It is also important to note that although both Methodist and Catholic participants argue that there is not so much written about the environment in the New Testament theologians are likely to disagree with them. Many theologians have started to study the bible in light of the ongoing environmental problems and have found that within the New Testament there are still plenty of things written about the environment and how to care and protect it beyond caring for your neighours and the poor (see for example DeWitt 1991; Jones 2003; Lucas 2005 Horrell 2010b; Horrell et al 2010; Bredin 2010). But it is indeed true that there is seemingly a lot less writing about the environment within the New Testament compared with the Old Testament. However, it must be remembered that the Gospels and the letters in New Testament were writing to individual people and churches with their own particular needs and not an entire nation that needed rules regarding land use or harvest practices and it is also important to emphasise that the first readers of the New Testament already had the 'much greener' Old Testament and that writings about stewardship would already be known to the readers of the first New Testament (see Lucas 2005). Another reason why the Methodist and Catholic participants perceive the New Testament as saying very little directly about the environment is probably also because most studies written by theologians and faith leaders are like to not be reaching the churchgoers in the pews (see also Delashmutt 2011 for a study about failure of statements and calls for actions by faith leaders in reaching believers).

Both Methodist and Catholic participants viewed the environment through a caring for others lens. Such a strongly human centred view can be criticised as ignoring the environment and denying its intrinsic value but for both the Catholic and Methodist participants the focus on human tragedies that come with environmental problems also provided them with an important incentive to address these problems. This incentive goes beyond contemporary droughts or flooding and also includes preventing future problems by changing lifestyles in order to prevent problems for future generations.

5.5.3: Caring for creation as restoring God' will

The Evangelical participants did not abandon the concept of stewardship. But they did change the content of the concept away from merely being about human domination over the rest of creation. For them the central idea of stewardship wasn't about the fact that humans were standing above the rest of nature but rather that both humans and the rest of nature are subordinate to God. Not the humans but God is in control. However, according to the Evangelical participants, humans are selfish and don't want to submit to God but rather want to be God themselves instead. This desire to become like God is where everything goes wrong. A male Evangelical participant explains:

What we're trying to do is try to restore the correct order in creation which puts God at the top, in charge of everything and we're kind of below God, which is a bit of a shock of a lot of people, they think they are God, we try to think that we come below him and we are supposed to be nice to each other, nice to His beautiful creation and kind of look after it and not be greedy. Now the whole of creation goes wrong and people put themselves first and they think that it's really important to have as many SUV's as possible and to have diamond collars for their dog and things like that.

Evangelical Male 2

This idea of environmental problems coming out of a failure to submit to God's rules is present among many participants. A female participant told the group that most people just seek to fulfil their own desires and that their own wishes come first without giving much thought to the consequences of their behaviour. This selfish behaviour leads to environmental problems. However, if people would be Christian and follow Jesus' teaching, people would be more willing to care about others and the environment.

It would be great if all had Jesus' agenda which is running on love but I'm afraid it doesn't. It runs on money and greed. But Jesus sets a different bar and actually his

kingdom is a loving kingdom where everybody has value, and all the creatures have their value

Evangelical female 1

As such, for evangelical participants environmental problems are not only seen as scientific or societal problems but also seen as spiritual problems that only can be solved by returning to God. This something that male respondent that also gave the quote on the previous page clearly states.

So, what we're learning is that to solve the problems of the world is not a political problem. It's more a kind of spiritual problem and if we put everything back in order with God at the top and we don't worship things like popularity, motorcars, money and things like that and we think that we don't need as much as possible of everything, we could live more humbly, live more sustainably and not spend all our money on pesticides, fertilisers. Then you would have a better ordered society and creation would be better.

Evangelical Male 2

To statements such as quoted above, other respondents replied with phrases like *'I couldn't agree more…..*' or '*Absolutely smashed it…. '*. (*Evangelical Females 1 & 2*). The idea that environmental problems were caused by spiritual problems was widely supported by participants. For the Evangelical participants the reason why there is climate change or drought or why there is so much deforestation is of course in the first place because humans are emitting too emissions or because people are cutting down too many trees but for the Evangelical participants this not the end of the analysis. The reason why people are willingly polluting the environment or abusing natural resources is because they lack Jesus in their life. Again the same male participant said it as the following:

People who are Christians, really disciples of Jesus, are trying to become more like him. Now He didn't go for flashy jewellery, he didn't even have a house, he didn't have a car. We should be more like him. And he cared for the environment, for widows, for orphans all these things.

Evangelical male 2

As such the solution to all the environmental problems according to the participants in the focus group is to become more like Jesus and following his (eco-friendly) example. In order to live like Jesus we need to, as female participant argues:

We need the Holy Spirit to come into their heart and there needs to be a relationship where God can give you ideas and you can be ready to receive it……. And then to start putting into practice things that he is asking you to do.

Evangelical female 1

For the participating Evangelicals, stewardship is not about taking control over nature and asserting your dominion over it but rather acknowledging that you are in a subordinate position in relation to God and demonstrating a willingness to follow Jesus and his humble lifestyle. For all the Evangelicals that participated in the focus group the concept stewardship extends far beyond merely being a concept to inspire care and concern for the environment. By weaving the concept of stewardship so deeply into wider Evangelical theology and by linking environmental degradation with a lack of 'proper' Christian faith, the participants made stewardship into a distinctly Evangelical concept that was used to make people care more about the environment but is was also used as a distinctly Evangelical tool to encourage evangelism. The idea that addressing environmental problems is a deeply Christian thing to do was very important for all the Evangelical participants because: *'if it's a big deal as far as God is concerned than it has to be a big deal as far as it is us concerned'* as the leader of the group put it. This deeply Evangelical understanding of caring for the environment has also implications for the concept of stewardship. Stewardship has often been accused of being too anthropocentric and granting people dominion of the rest of nature (see most famously White 1967) but for the participants in the focus group it was absolutely not anthropocentric. For them stewardship is theocentric, God in the centre[25]. As such the Evangelical participants still used stewardship but had turned it into a distinctly Evangelical concept.

5.5.4: Caring because of the interconnectedness

The liberal Anglicans who participated in the focus group abandoned the concept of stewardship completely and no longer use the concept for themselves, although they do admit that some other Christians might find it still useful. For them the incentive to care and protect the environment doesn't come from a bible passage but rather from an acknowledgement that the whole of the planet is interrelated and interconnected through evolutionary processes. A male Anglican said it the following:

We are physically interconnected, certainly all biotic things, DNA and were connected through the fact that all our atoms whether snakes, HIV retro virus or us, all our atoms were created in the stars and I think that is also confirmed by my

[25] Hoffman & Sandelands (2005) make a similar argument but based on Catholic theology

understanding of the Christian faith that all things are interconnected and you can't simply chop off one bit and say this bit is more important than that bit.

Male Anglican 2

A female participant argued in very similar terms:

I'm not sure if it's my faith or just a sort of general optic, the sort of interconnectedness. But that I think is linked…. It's all connected really. There is a point sometimes that I think that we're not…. We make a distinction from anything else, ourselves from everything else but there is that sense of wholeness that are all here sort of together. It's that wholeness that actions have consequences and counteractions and things like that.

Female Anglican 1

Both these quotes show that for the Liberal Anglican participants the idea of interconnectivity was very important. The whole of nature, including humans is connected with each other and has a shared origin. For the participants in focus group nature wasn't something distant or 'other' but they were part of it. This connection was especially fostered through an emphasis on evolution and how humans, plants, animals and everything else has a shared origin 'in the stars' as the male Anglican puts it. For the participants this shared origin created a kind of bond with the rest of nature and also a made them stand on equal grounds with the rest of nature rather than above. As such stewardship was rejected by them and instead the interconnectedness and the shared origin of the whole of nature (including humans) was strongly emphasised and used to create respect for nature and avoid causing harm. According to the participants nature is much more than something to care, protect or use for your benefit. Humans are part of it all and not distant stewards. As such as the only church they seem to step away from the anthropocentric view that is dominant in both stewardship and the caring for other approach and instead they seem to embrace a more bio-centric prospective whereby humans are on equal ground with the rest of nature. This does however not mean that the participants saw no difference between themselves and other plants or animals. According to the earlier mention Anglican male:

Certainly it seems that there are some other species that have glimmers of self-consciousness. Some of the other primates. But it's difficult to argue that they got quite ours. So, there is a responsibility that we cannot impute to cats, dogs and glow worms.

Anglican Male 2

But rather than delving into all the philosophical and ethical consequences of putting humans on the same level as the rest of nature the important thing for all

the participants is that by emphasising interconnectivity and shared origin the distance between them and the rest of nature disappeared and they could no longer watch animals being driven to extinction or glaciers melting away without feeling guilty or wanting to do something. It is important to realise that this idea of interconnectivity and shared origin is for these Liberal Anglican participants not some secular concept derived from evolutionary biology alone but for them the idea of interconnectivity and shared origin is a *'key Christian element and a key religious element in all religions'(Anglican Male 1)* as another Anglican male put it. It is also important to realise that anthropocentrism and bio-centrism[26] are two (often opposed) concepts that have generated huge amounts of debates between the two camps and both terms also come in various forms and interpretations (see for example Taylor 1983; Rolston III 1988, p62-78; Boddice 2011; Attfield 1987; Coren 2015; Plumwood 1996; Post 1993; McShane 2007; Welchman 2012; Sztybel 2000). As such it is quite tricky to say that Liberal Anglican participants have a bio-centric perspective and Methodist, Evangelical and Catholic participants have an anthropocentric perspective as there always will be a perspective that disagrees with the used definition of anthropocentrism or bio-centrism. Also, as will be shown in later on in this chapter, in their practice there is much less difference between the churches.

5.6: Putting the blame on underlying issues and demanding societal wide change

The now following part will argue that the faith-based concerns for the environment that the participants are not merely concerned with their own behaviour or lifestyle but that many participants also see a real need for wider societal change. Also this section focuses on the arguments made by the different churches rather than the actual practice.

Despite the different theological underpinnings of their environmental concerns all the participating churches share one thing in common. That is that below the environmental problems they see injustice and inequality that also needs to be addressed. Often participants blame societal structures for enabling or worsening environmental problems that effect society. The blame is often put on things like 'obsession with economic growth', 'consumer culture' or 'vested interests'. It is important to note that it wasn't just individual participants putting the blame on such underlying societal roots or only the churches that focused on caring for others but

[26] Anthropocentrism and bio-centrism are also related to the terms speciesism and deep ecology. Although these terms have somewhat different meaning they do argue similar things. Deep Ecology is the idea that humans are just one of many equal components in a worldwide ecosystem (Naess 1973) while speciesism is the idea that not all species are equal and that there is a ranking among species. For example humans, at the top, then chimpanzees followed gorilla's, whales, mice, glow worms and all the way down to algae and plankton (see Lafolette & Shanks 1993; Horta 2010).

rather all the churches as a whole often would point to things like obsessions with economic growth or material possession as the cause of environmental problems. As such each church viewed environmental problems that something that needs to be addressed by changing the structure of society. For example, the Catholic priest told how the heard on a radio programme how consuming and buying more and more stuff had become a kind of religion for people:

There is a guy who has written a book about markets as religion. So, he says the market is the deity, the sales manager, reps and banks are the priesthood. It was fascinating… The consumers are the congregation…. I mean it's not a new theory but the market. We are in a market driven world. So, we know what we should be doing but the market is so powerful that we can't stop buying things. Excuse the language, well I can't say it. I got a bag, a shopping bag. It's one of those keep calm and carry on things. Buy more (bleep) or we're all (bleep) (Laughing) And it's fantastic, I so want to take it to Waitrose…… (laughs)

Catholic priest

For the Catholic priest blind faith in materialism and an obsession with buying more stuff without regards for the consequences was causing many environmental problems. For him the problems weren't caused by personal choices of individuals but rather by norms and expectations in society that favoured getting more and more of the latest fashionable items. For the priest the cause of it all was *'the market saying: Keep buying, keep buying'.* A female participant strongly agreed with such an analysis and said that society was becoming more and more obsessed with having more and more stuff:

I understand that people have things that they like or nice things or whatever to use and enjoy but you don't need 10 of them, you don't need them or just in boxes somewhere. I think that is part of what Pope Francis is trying to get across. It's about whether you own the possessions or the possessions own you and I think that our consumer society is becoming more of this. Sometimes it's thrown away and sometimes we hoard more and more and more. But they are overwhelmed and they are burdened by their possessions

Female Catholic 1

For the Catholics quoted above environmental problems were caused by things that went beyond someone's shopping behaviour or willingness to recycle but rather were caused by societal wide norms and expectations that were damaging the environment such as always wanting to have newer and more fashionable items. Such ideas also seem to point at a necessity to engage at societal level rather than only focusing on individual behaviour and responsibility. Also the liberal

Anglican and the Evangelical participants see wider causes of environmental problems. They especially focused on large corporations and how their 'vested interests' are responsible for inaction and make life difficult to local farmers and food sellers. During a discussion about the low pay that ordinary farmers get for products an Evangelical female put the blame on large corporations who were putting profit before people. According to her, large corporations are controlling and manipulating everything and causing injustice only because they are profiting from the current situation and that's wicked according to her.

The poor cows and the people who have to milk the cows surely, they are worth more than 50p per hour. To be milking their cows, to be feeding their cows, to be sending it off to the supermarkets or wherever, they are worth a lot more than that. The injustice of the corporate…… You got the corporate and then you got the ordinary run of the mill family business who got no protection…..There is plenty of food to go around for everybody but there is this whole manipulation. Everybody needs to eat but there is a control thing going on about the food and I think it's pretty wicked.

Evangelical Female 1

Also the liberal Anglican participants used very strong terms when they were discussing food production and food waste. They describe the current method of flying in vegetables from around the world and vegetables that will be destroyed if they aren't the right size as a completely ridiculous and crazy system that reflects the way that capitalism works. While discussing food production the Anglican priest mentioned an American report on food waste that she recently hard read.

The amount of food waste in America, that they are ploughing back into the land and you just say we got a very, very, very crazy system and has to do with the way that capitalism is working.

Anglican priest, female

Other participants strongly agreed with her and quickly a discussion about what was wrong with the current way of producing food started:

AF1[27]*: An example of that in Britain is that there was a farm that was growing parsnips and they had to reject and plough back into the land a huge, huge number of parsnips because they weren't the right size or the right weight.*
AM1: It's the same sort of thing when supermarkets do beans which got to be straight and 6 inches long. So where do they grow them? They grow them in

[27] FA= Anglican female AM= Anglican male

Kenya and then they fly them to England. And then think of all the pollution that, that creates. There are so many things going on that are completely ridiculous
AF1: Roses are grown in Africa as well and just sent over by plane, sent over to the Netherlands.
AM1: This is all a reflection of the Western desire to have material things and you know we have been trained to think that a carrot has to be straight, it can't be dirty or whatever. We got into that mentality where if you said that to somebody in New Guinea they would think you're daft.
AM3: They're right…
AM1: Absolutely right…

Shortly after this discussion in which all participants expressed their strong dislike of the current economic structure they slightly shifted their focus and discussed why there was so much inaction and why politicians seemed to be unable or unwilling to address the problems within the current food production system that they just had discussed.

AM3: It's the invested interests that are holding back all this business. If you think of the invested interests they have a stranglehold on politicians. The politicians are too threatened to make the decisions that need to be made because of the invested interests. We are in this abysmal situation at the moment.
AM2: I think the fact that you can make more money from flying beans from Kenya to Britain than from not flying…
AM1: Also, there is a sufficient number of politicians are kind of involved in the production, I don't mean directly but indirectly. So, in a sense they support each other.
AM3: yeah exactly.
AM1: Or should I say the distract each other.

As becomes clear in all the quotes and discussions above, participants from all the different churches, see underlying causes below environmental problems. Often these causes have to do with how the economic system that spurs people and companies into having more and more without paying attention to the consequences for both humans and the environment. The participants blamed societal 'desires for material things' and a market driven world that protects unjust and manipulative companies and vested interests for the current environmental problem. The Methodist participants didn't really join in with blaming politicians, the economy or the market driven society, despite their focus on justice and caring for others. They did wanted to stop environmental problems and also saw underlying societal causes but they never really went into the politicised statements as made by other churches. But if churches really want to challenge what they

perceive to be roots of environmental problems and want to change the ‘market driven society’ and alter the norms that favour consumption over sustainability then only improving recycling rates among churchgoers or putting solar panels on church roofs won’t be sufficient. The whole of society will need to change. And this will require churches to look beyond individual behaviour and church building related issues and instead seek to work together as a collective and letting their voice be heard outside the church. However, as the next section will show, all the participating churches are struggling with this aspect. Within all the churches there is a strong emphasis on individual behaviour and personal responsibility, and it is quite a struggle to find a role for churches that goes beyond stimulating sustainable behaviour. Churches do acknowledge the need to address environmental problems as a collective but all the focus seems rather inward instead of outward.

5.7: Focus on individual behaviour

The following section will argue that despite wanting societal wide range (as discussed in the previous section) most participants are strongly focused on improving their personal lifestyle and are struggling to find ways to take addressing environmental problems beyond improving their own personal lifestyle. It will also argue that the strong focus on individual behaviour is at odds with the high expectations that many academics, activists and media have as they see churches and faith-based organisations are excellent places to start collective mobilisation and action rather places to stimulate sustainable behaviour. This section will again focus on the arguments that are being put forward by participants rather than the actual practice which again will come in a later section.

5.7.1: Improving your own lifestyle rather than church led engagement

Despite the desire for societal wide change, the participating churches often focus on personal behaviour and personal responsibility. There was acknowledgement from among participants from across the different churches that only focusing on recycling or solar panels the church roof isn’t sufficient but participants found it difficult to see a role for churches that went beyond stimulating sustainable behaviour. All the activities that churches or individual members do or are willing to undertake have a strong emphasis on individual behaviours like recycling, buying local or giving stuff away to charity shops rather than challenging the political system as was expressed in the precious section. This due to the fact that institutionalised Christianity is declining but also because the participating churches are struggling to find a role for themselves as a community.

Each participating church argued that it is important to protect and care for the environment. But when asked what this caring looks like and how churches can practice it, often the answers focused narrowly on things like recycling, reducing air

miles and making more use of public transport. During a discussion with Methodists participants were asked what caring for creation means to them

D[28]: *What does caring for creation mean?*

FM2: People interact with it in different ways. So, for some people maybe it's about not wasting energy and recycling and all those sorts of things but some people have a more human take on it and not wasting resources, the food waste is appalling, there should be enough food to go around and even things like eating less meat so that there is more food to go around, all these sorts of things. I think people could take it in all sorts of different ways. There is the transport issue, isn't there? Some people decide to cycle more or walk or not have a car, car share……

ML2: Destroying the rain forest is another one. It is actually destroying for our own ends

ML1: And also I remember talking to X and X about years ago, we were talking about air mileage, you know travelling. And there was this thing, I don't know if it still exists. If you go you could on an airplane you could plant a tree or something

MM1: Carbon offset….

FM1: Yeah, I don't know how those have changed over the years, the carbon offset.

MM3: You can still do it.

FM4: Not sure, it seems like a way of dealing with your guilt.

MM4: Next thing is buying each other's carbon off set, isn't it? It gets abstracted more and more.

MM1: I guess that you can think of it on a sort of personal level. What sort recycling you do, do wasted mileage in a car, all these sorts of things. But you could also think about it in a far broader sense of sharing the earth's resources more evenly. And you could actually think of it in giving an equality of life across the world, you know. It would take lots of different levels.

D: What should a church teach about the environment?

MM5: Loving your neighbours as yourself. If you think about the choices that we have as consumers, if you can chose between a holiday which involves flying or going on a boat maybe that's worth thing now we have to keep our carbon emissions as low as possible. We have lots of things in which we have choices as consumers.

MM1: Some of them are not straight forward or are they? Because I was thinking about….. This time of year you often find fruit and vegetables which come from abroad and there is the thought that environmentally that might be a bad thing because of all the air miles involved and so on transporting the items. Then on the other hand you could also have the thought that by you buying those goods you're

[28] D is Derk, the researcher himself

actually helping to keep people in employment in areas where they otherwise might not have that much employment.
FM1: And actually it can be more environmentally damaging growing food in green houses in this country than it is growing them outside in Spain and flying.
FM3: I don't think you should. But you could argue…… It's a compromise, everybody has a level that they are willing to go to and then it gets to the point where you think, well actually I don't wanna do that, I rather want to buy them abroad and it's not like it's right.. People managed without them for a long time…..
MM1: Done without what? Cabbages and potatoes….. (laughing)
FM3: But it is still, everybody here agrees that we should doing our things for the environment, everybody has a point where they go to.
FM4: We all make choices, we all do probably quite well in one area but not so much in the other.

The discussion above between Methodist participants shows that although there is some criticism about carbon off set and participants also argued that they should not forget to look at the wider picture, most answers were still strongly focused on changing personal behaviour. When asked what the Methodist church should teach about the environment the answer was that it should people to be good consumers and after that the discussion went off into a discussion about food and air miles. The discussion above demonstrates the strong focus on personal behaviour and the ways in which to improve that behaviour. Most people talked about ways to improve their own behaviour and emphasise personal responsibility and didn't spend much time on the wider implications of caring for creation beyond the individual. It is actually quite surprising to see how much emphasise participants put on how individuals can have its own strengths and how each person can do something else because everybody is living his or her own life. The collective role as members of the churches was left untouched by the participants. This then seems to be a very big contrast with the radical and political talk from the previous section in which many participants of the different focus groups favoured collective, society wide action. However, after all the focus on personal behaviour one female participant remarked:

The difficult thing about it is something that we….. It needs a collective response, it is something that as one individual we can't make that much of a….. we can make a difference but it's not going to be effective, it needs a whole collective response, isn't it?

Female Methodist 4

In order to make certain that participants would discuss about this comment, I said:

A church would be a good place to respond as a collective…..?

To which she replied:

ML4: Yeah, it would…..

However, instead about talking about the church as a community or what actions they could do together, the participants started talking about church building and the solar panels, recycle bins and mandatory environmental audits.

MM1: Do environmental issues come at church council meetings, those sort of meetings where decisions about the life of the church are taken? Because that's another point where I feel….. our theology has done in church meetings, we think about the decisions that we need to take as well as what happens on a Sunday morning in the bible study. It did came up when we were thinking of our new building because actually….. But on the ongoing property side, which I suppose is an example of where it might come up. It is one of the, if you look at the property schedule there are always environmental audits, you could argue that it is something that needs, it's supposed to be looked at…. It is supposed to and actually I think we are really bad looking at it. We just have so many…. All those schedules, there are so many audits. It is another piece of paper that needs doing rather than helpful or proactive

ML4: I don't know if the (Church X) has any sort of practical things that they try to do in terms of basic things like recycling, no idea, all the good within…..

ML1: I mean, there are one or two recycling bins but today they probably not used…… In public places it's always more difficult, isn't it? I mean we had from young church we did signs that went on top of the green boxes when they were first introduced in church. But because recycling is different in different areas people don't quite know that to recycle so they….. In Exeter we still don't recycle food whereas…..

MM1: Going back to the churches response, is there much from central church? (Name X) do you think there is much?

MM2: No, with things like the environmental audits and the things that are to encourage those sorts of things, I don't think there is much in the property scheme about renewables, that sort of thing, that I can think of… I don't that there is something that says you need to use sustainable, environmentally friendly

MM1: You're encouraged to consider it and it doesn't go an awful further than that…..

As such for most participants the focus was firmly on the personal side and when it came to the church it was often building focused rather than the community. The whole engagement with the environment seemed to focus on the building and how the individual can 'green' his or her life. But it is not only the Methodist participants that were strongly focused on the things that they could do as individuals. Also the Catholic and Evangelical participants strongly focused on personal behaviour and personal responsibility. During the focus group the Catholic priest mentioned that he was inspired by Laudato Si. When asked what he did with his inspiration, he replied by saying:

D: What did you do with the inspiration?

***CP[29]**: I recycle here more than I have ever before….*

Others: Yeah…..

FC2: When I go somewhere and they have a glass bin but they have nowhere to take it. So, I take it home and recycle it because they can't. It's with things like, that I will recycle everything that I can get my hands on because it shouldn't be going to waste

MC1: We try it out….. And even with clothing. What we don't need, that goes to the homeless in need. You don't throw it away.

FC1: When my father died, Mum decided to have a single bed. Because obviously all the bedding was for a double bed. So, I got the sowing machine out and all the things that Mum liked….. We didn't say throw it all out and buy new, we find ways and I find the same with cloths. It may be a dress but you can make it into skirt. So, often clothing that I have gets recycled by me into two or three and then there comes a blouse and a skirt and you remake and you take them apart, it's such a lovely material and we make it into something else.

MC1: There is in St Thomas a place where they keep good furniture, using things and then they can help people who need them. We have done that as well. Because they had….

FC1: and the dining chairs……You ring them up and they come and collect things.

FC2: I had a back problem, so I needed different dining chairs, so we bought new ones but the other ones went down for someone else to have the benefit. It's a way of life. So, everything before you sort of… think I bring it to the tip or I throw it in the rubbish bin, you think what can I do with this.

CP: I don't do that, I must admit. I do throw things away. I'm conscious about how much food I throw away. I know it's not good but I'm saying I'm conscious of it. I think that's the thing, being conscious of it is good because I'm very conscious of my water usage every time I shower, especially in the winter and you want to stand

[29] CP= Catholic Priest; FC= Female Catholic; MC= Male Catholic

in the shower and when you have washed, you just want to stand and luxuriate in water because it's warm and lovely and I turn it off because I think it's ridiculous because I have already used more than anyone should use. I turn the tap off when I brush my teeth. I try to do that as much as I can.

As can be clearly seen above, the whole discussion about being inspired and wanting to do something seemed to focus only on personal behaviour. The inspiration didn't seem to be used to go beyond the personal. After this discussion the participants went on to have other discussions about flying, recycling and giving excess stuff away to charity but never did the discussions really make any claims or suggestions about implications for the wider society or church as a community. Solutions to environmentally problems were mostly discussed in terms of life style changes and although the participants had also claimed during others discussions that the underlying problem was the 'market driven society' they seemed to be focused on individual solutions rather than addressing these identified society wide problems. There was of course also talking about theology (as discussed earlier in this chapter) but all the more practical things that they talked about seemed to focus on personal behaviour.

For the Evangelical participants the situation is quite similar. Also the Evangelical participants discussed about recycling, renewable energy and waste reduction on an individual or a household level but spoke little about the role of the church as a community in relation to environmental problems. During one of the discussion a question was asked about how important the environment was for their church. The responses to this question focused very strong on the individual members of the church but seem to forget what the churches could do together as a community.

D: How important is the environment for the church?
EL[30]: Actually, I think we do care about because we're recycling here, we care about who we get are electricity from for our bills here so I do think it's a big deal actually. We don't like waste generally.. So, I don't think t we're ignoring it. As a church we take seriously.

In a similar way a female participant talked about the drinks and food that the church used on it premise and said: *'always Fairtrade in this room'* (Evangelical female 2). And although during the focus group there were discussions about the pros and cons of solar energy, the benefits of fresh eggs from the farmers market and the reasons for buying oddly shaped vegetables very little was discussed beyond 'greening' the church building and 'greening' their personal life. One male

[30] EL= Evangelical Leader

participant stated, *'I think all of us in our own lives are trying to do that more and more'* (Evangelical Male 2). This strong emphasis on their personal life reflects very well how the evangelical participants were thinking about addressing environmental problems. So, although the evangelical participants took the environment serious according to themselves, questions about what the church should do always immediately went towards recycling, waste management and changing electricity supplier.

5.7.2: Insufficiency of individual behaviour

As already stated in the introduction to this thesis, academics have been very critical about such a strong focus on individual behaviour. For many academics the focus on changing individual behaviour through their consumption is not sufficient (Schlosberg & Coles 2016; Spaargaren & Mol 2008) and it is seen as a development whereby only consumer behaviour is actively being linked to all sorts of social and environmental problems and that the link with deeper cultural and societal causes is ignored. As such rather than being encouraged to address the roots of the environmental problems by for example challenging in the way that people value nature or by giving more importance to the environmental impact when developing economic policies, people are urged to focus their own life rather than the whole of society and as such focusing on individual behaviour is perceived as a much more passive form of engagement with the environment whereby people are seen as consumer citizens (Slocum 2004; Johnson 2008; Jones et al 2011; Whitehead et al 2011) whose individual behaviour and especially their consumption can be changed by the use of social marketing (Kotler & Zaltman 1971; Peattie & Peattie 2009) and behavioural economics (Thaler & Sunstein 2008; Sunstein & Thaler 2003). Citizens focus on their own life rather social and political forces that influence their lives. This individualistic behavioural approach is currently the dominant way of engaging with environmental issues. There is support for such an approach, both on a philosophical level (Camerer et al 2003; Sunstein & Thaler 2003) and also at an empirical level as such an individualistic behavioural approach has been shown to be effective (Goldstein et al 2008; Ayres et al 2012; Ferraro & Price 2013; Chang et al 2016; van Horen et al 2018). But this behavioural approach is also very narrow and focuses only individual behaviour and is failing to see and address the cultural and societal problems beyond consumption (Shove 2010; Corner & Randall 2011; Barr et al 2011; Barr & Prillwitz 2014; Seyfang 2005; Barnett 2010; Johnson 2008; Goodwin 2012; Moloney & Strengers 2014). It seeks the cause and solution of environmental problems within the individual rather than seeing the underlying societal and cultural forces that shape how individuals perceive the environment. However, as is clearly visible from the discussions above, also in churches is this individualistic approach the most used approach.

5.7.3: Failure to meet expectations

However, an important problem with this individualistic approach is that doesn't really meet the high expectations that many have about religious institutions when it comes to the environment. As already outlined in chapters 1 and 2, many academics and environmental activists have very high expectations of the contributions by religious institutions (see for example Sagan 1990; Kolmes & Butkus 2009; Hall et al 2009; McLeod & Palmer 2015). Academics expect faith groups to bring in new moral arguments that can shed light on the environment from new angles and which can take debates in innovative directions and engage people who might be very sceptical about green politics or environmental activism but are much more willing to listen to churches and faith leaders. However, as was argued in chapter empirical evidence for the claims is seriously lacking with almost no existing research on how local churches and churchgoers engage with the environment. And as such this empirical chapter choose to do more explorarory oriented research with local churches in Exeter. What this chapter has been showing up to now, the participating churches are following a wider trend that strongly emphasises individual behaviour and personal responsibility rather than proposing a new and innovative prospective. This emphasising of individual behaviour has the downside that most of the high expectations towards assume that believers engage with the environment as a collective through their church or environmental faith-based organisations rather than as individuals (see for example Palmer & Finley 2003; Dasgupta & Ramanathan 2014). The academics, activists and media who have been depicted in chapters 1 and 2 as praising faith leaders for their calls for action are not interested in believers who buy more organic or who recycle more of their waste. Of course they see such actions as positive developments but many academics, activists and media want to see believers who are willing to challenge to underlying assumptions and undertake collective action. Many of the supportive writings that have been discussed in chapter 2 argue that churches and faith-based organisations are excellent places to challenge the status quo, mobilise people and start collective action to save the environment but the participating churches don't seem to be meeting the high expectations of these academics and environmental activists. Of course, the participating churches do care about the environment and they do have faith-based reasons to care but this doesn't spur them into proposing innovative and new approaches about how to relate to the environment but rather they keep themselves to well-known individualistic approaches. However, it also important to add that although too much emphasis on individual behaviour does indeed blur the underlying wider social and cultural causes it is also needed that individuals have a personal commitment to improve their lifestyle rather than waiting for rules and regulations to be implemented by politicians which might take many years to take effect. Individual actions like recycling or turning down the heater are easy to latch on to for people and in such a sense one single individual action might spill into

additional behavioural actions. This principle is often described as the positive environmental spill over effect (Truelove et al 2014) and research has shown that such a spill over effect exists (Cornelissen et al 2008; Lanzini & Thøgersen 2014; & Thøgersen & Noblet 2012; Carrico et al 2018; Lauren et al 2017). The underlying assumption below this positive spill over effect is that once a 'pro-environmental action' gets a 'foot in the door' people will start doing more such actions (Burger 1999). But other have also argued that it's effects are weak or even non-existed (Thøgersen & Crompton 2009) or have pointed at the negative spill-over effects, namely, people undertaking environmentally unfriendly actions because are also done some environmentally friendly actions earlier (Mazar & Zhong 2010; Tiefenbeck et al 2013). Studies like the ones above only focus on the spill-over to other individual actions but one study also examined the spill-over to political behaviour and found that the spill-over also included an increased likelihood of contacting the participant' senator about climate change (see Lacasse 2019). So, perhaps getting more and more involved in pro-environmental behaviour might eventually also spill-over into political action. Doing individualistic actions has also in some sense the benefit that it can be done no matter how unwilling to act the rest of society might be.

I suppose even if by myself buying Fairtrade or local milk or something at least …. I'm doing the things…. It's under my control. It's all about choices that you make, and if not enough of us do and it won't make a difference, at least my conscience will be clear and I will be happy to say that I'm doing it. I suppose, I think to myself, I'm accountable for my decisions on lots of things, in how many miles I drive in a car, I don't want to be wasteful really on what I got.

Evangelical group leader

5.8: Attempting to move beyond individualistic behaviour

The now following section will argue that despite the strong focus on changing individual behaviour during the focus groups there were still participants who were seeking to challenge the strong focus on individual behaviour. This section will also argue that the participants from the liberal Anglican Church all opposed the strong focus on individual behaviour. But it will also be argued that participants from all the focus groups were struggling to put their criticism into action.

5.8.1: Criticising the focus on individual behaviour

Although both, Catholic, Methodist and Evangelical participants all strongly focused on individual behaviour, sometimes people did challenge the strong focus on individual behaviour. For example during a discussion among the Methodist participants about what the church could contribute to the addressing of environmental problems. One male participant started a discussion when he said:

MM2: If the church wants to have an impact on environmental issues, what more would it do? Because actually, there is reasonable recycling these days
ML4: But this isn't all about recycling…..
MM2: But you can always improve it.
ML4: Recycling is an easy thing to latch on to.
MM2: Yes…..
ML4: But there so many more and wider things.
MM2: What's missing? Not what the church could actually devote itself to do.
MM5: The (Name Church) could say, if you drive past another one (church building) on your way to here than we don't want you here anymore (laughing)
ML1: Or if you drive past other people's homes on the way, pick them up.
ML4: Yeah, that's true. It's all sorts of things. I mean, I don't know what lightbulbs are used, what energy we buy? Could we have solar panels on our roof? There are loads of things that we can look at. In the products that we buy, do we look at, for the church, do we look at sustainable sources for them?

In the discussion above, the focus on individual behaviour is clearly challenged by a female participant and also other participants acknowledge her criticism and ask themselves, what is missing? What can we do more? But the answers to these questions remained confined to things like picking up other people on the way to church or using more environmentally friendly light bulbs. Again, the community aspect of church remained unexplored. But it has to be acknowledged, as a female participant already says, recycling and also other more individualistic things are easy things to latch on to. Recycling is something that can easily be started or encouraged and is much easier to do than other activities such as running community gardens or engaging in local politics. Recycling or other similar activities can also function as a starting point. And although there is very strong focus on individual behaviour, it is still really important. If people wait for rules and regulations to change collective behaviour it might take a very long time before anything happens.

Something very similar happened during the focus group with the Evangelical Anglican church. Also here a participant challenged the strong behavioural focus in quite a dramatic way and said that everybody needs to be on board and as such seemed to suggest that there was a need to go beyond a focus on recycling and green electricity:

As individual I have no control over it, there is nothing I can do about it. We can only do it as a big enough group of people all sat together.

However, the interesting thing about this objection is that the male who made this objection wasn't a 'real' member of the Evangelical Anglican Church but someone who received help from the faith-based organisation 'Christians Against Poverty'. This FBO provides debt counselling services and also helps people with addictions[31] and collaborates in Exeter with this Evangelical church. The focus group took place during a 'walk in Monday' and although many participants were members of the church some also came via 'Christians Against Poverty'. So, interestingly the participant who challenged the dominant view came from the FBO rather than the church itself. But it is important to emphasise that this individual also held evangelical views. However, other participants didn't do very much with these comments and the focus remained on more individualistic approaches and personal responsibility. Near the end of the focus group, the group leader told everyone how the focus group had made him think a lot about environmental issues and he then continued to give examples about what he had been thinking:

This has made me think about all this it a lot. Talking about it has made me think about how important it is, the choices that I make, what I buy or don't buy and don't waste money on things that I don't need. But am I buying things, thinking about where they come from and whether people have been treated at the other end who are making these things and has the country been taken advantage of to take all the materials needed and how far has it travelled. So, I want be a bit more thinking about where things come from, not only do I need it but also where does it come from, am I paying a fair price for it? So, I think it's good to be reminded of all these things that are involved when we spend or money, isn't it? And if I don't need something anymore give it away so somebody else can use it rather than just chucking it away.

Group leader Evangelical Anglicans

Although probably with all the good intentions, the group leader focused very strongly on personal behaviour and emphasised how individuals needed to become aware of consequences of their behaviour and how everyone should try to live more sustainable and also live with me respect for others who have less. But this view was challenged by a male participant who argued that collaboration was essential because people on their own couldn't make a difference against 'big businesses'.

'To me we need to be aware that our choices have a knock on effect again, again and again. So we have to be super conscious about what we do. I don't think one

[31] For more see https://capuk.org/

person making a choice to do something on its own makes next to no difference……. But if we all make conscience choices about what we buy it will actually make a difference. Because if nothing else big business expects the money in their pocket and if they don't get it. If we all stop… boycott a particular product or whatever the manufacturer of that product is going say: ohh we lost 10% of our sales this month or whatever. If everybody does it. On my own I can't make much difference. But we have to be aware that we can make differences with our choices'.

Evangelical male 3

In the first quote by the Evangelical group leader there a strong emphasis on personal lifestyle changes and personal responsibility. People are encouraged to assess their behaviour and make the necessary changes in their lives in order to reduce the impact that their life style choices have on the environment and other people. There is no attention to what they can do together as a church or how they can contribute to the wider society. The second quote seems to give more consideration to the wider society, as fighting alone against big businesses is seen as a lost cause by the participant, but the role as church is still absent and personal choice remains very important. As such the Evangelical participants still seem to be strongly focused on individualistic solutions and personal responsibilities but there are some who challenge this view.

5.8.2: Seeking to move beyond individualistic behaviour

The Liberal Anglican participants stood apart from the other participating churches in the sense that all the participants in the focus group saw a need to go beyond greening individual behaviour. Although participants did their recycling and tried to use public transport there was also a feeling among the participants that just individual improvements wouldn't solve the waste problems or stop climate change. According to the Anglican priest there are three ways in which people can address environmental problems. Firstly, there is the option to have a government who cares about the future and who actively seeks to prevent future environmental problems by implementing national and international rules and regulations. But according to her this is 'completely unrealistic' because *'they (politicians) want power above everything and that overrides any questions of what's going to happen in 50 years'* (Anglican priest, female). Secondly, she saw opportunities for small communities that try to live independently and self- supportive without relying on fossil fuels or multinationals. *'Little settlements in Britain which are entirely self-supporting and don't depend on any way on the main' electricity or water from the system'* as she described them. This second way seems to be reflected in the transition movement. Lastly, she distinguished a third way in which people are encouraged to make their life sustainable by changing their life style and aided by

tax incentives from the government. According to her this third approach is the most used but it won't solve the problems but it is an appropriate *'intermediate thing'*. *'It's not a bad idea but it won't solve all the problems'* as she put it. As such she strongly emphasised the need to step up the efforts of society and seek ways to address environmental problems as a collective. Other participants agreed with this analysis and had similar ideas. For example, a male participant stated:

'It depends on whether you're at a micro or macro scale. Micro scale is fine, it's people picking up litter and doing all sorts of things….. But it got to be on a macro scale because things are happening so fast'.

Anglican Male 1

Another male participant agreed with this analysis and argued that environmental problems needed *'a greater common response'* (Anglican Male 2) rather than individuals picking up litter or buying electric cars. As such an approach which focused on individual behaviour was rejected by all participants of the focus group. This was very clear during a discussion between two male participants about the usefulness of focusing on making your own life style 'green'.

AM1: But how do you do it? Actually it very difficult. You can work at personal level and set up a little commune that is self-supporting, you can do that, that's feasible, we had it today.
AM2: (Name X)'s brother in Australia lives in precisely that….
AM1: Ohh, he does…. Right. And you can have these little things like, oh there are people building houses that are…..
AM2: Carbon neutral…
AM1: Yes, that sort of thing. Is that big enough to make any difference? You don't know.
AM2: I think that things like solar panels and so forth are good thing because they are cutting down and therefore lengthening the resources of non-renewable energy providers. But making a difference as far as climate change is concerned…..
AM1: I fear that's probably true

A bit later in the discussion one of the male participants made it again very clear that only behavioural changes are not sufficient and that more needs to be happening:

As a human at our level, yes we can do the sort of things that you are talking about and we feel, you know, every good about it because we use less water and build this and the other. But is doesn't make very much difference unless we know that

we are working as part of a larger corporate network and that's really were we got to get busy, I think.

Anglican Male 1

In the discussion above, participants are sympathetic to the attempts to make individual behaviour more sustainable, but they also see that such individual attempts will not be able to solve environmental problems alone. Changes that go beyond individual behaviour is required. Without more collective action, or corporate action as the Liberal Anglican participants call it, all the behavioural changes will have little effect. However, as will be discussed in the next session, making the church go beyond individual behaviour is difficult. For the participating churches there are obstacles that prevent them from acting collectively.

5.9: Practical church-led engagement with the environment

The now following section will discuss how the different churches practically engage with the environment. But it also shows that despite good intentions all participating churches struggle with giving the environment a place in their church life.

All the churches that took part in the focus groups didn't have activities or services that are specifically about environment, although both Methodist and liberal Anglican participants mentioned that they had harvest services in which the environment is an important component. But each church openly admitted that there was little explicit attention for the environment during church related activities. But this doesn't mean that churches didn't want to space to the environment or forgot to give it space. It was rather a case of *'there should be more attention to all sorts of things'* (Evangelical Male 2) as many participants were already very busy with other church related activities and especially the liberal Anglican, Methodist and Catholic participants were feeling the pressure on their resources from the ongoing decline of institutionalised Christianity. But the Catholics were also a special case as with the publication of 'Laudato Si' the environment suddenly came full in the spot lights. However, this didn't lead to much more attention for the environment during Mass or other church related activities.

D: Did people specifically talk about it (Laudato Si) at church?

CP: We mentioned it, we put it in the newsletter, we advertised so that you could buy a copy, we had an evening, CAFOD[32] organised an evening in Exeter where three people spoke about it from different points, different aspects, there was a guy

[32] CAFOD (Catholic Agency For Overseas Development) is a Catholic development organisation that has been focused on fighting poverty, especially in third world countries but which recently also started to give attention to environmental problems. See also https://cafod.org.uk/

from the MET office spoke, which was very interesting and then one of our parishioners, she is a lecturer at the university in environmental issues and population or something, I can't remember, she spoke. It was good and quite a lot of people came. Then we asked questions. It was an interesting evening.

MC2: I attended a conference on Laudato Si last year at Buckfast.

CP: Yes, that's right by Cafod and all the clergy had a day on it. We were invited to a day where somebody took us through the document which was very interesting and very enlightening. But I think generally at church we don't.

MC1: Yes, that hasn't really fed back, if you had a day on it.

FC1: But you did a retreat talk at Honiton….

CP: I did a day on Ladato si during the retreat. Yes, that's right

MC1: No, I was meaning has homily, I don't…

CP: No, because you see my homilies are to do with the readings that we are given. It doesn't prevent me but it doesn't make me, oh yeah let's speak about the environment because it is all about issues about being nice to your neighbour.

So for the Catholic participants there were events organised for those who were interested in Laudato Si but there wasn't so much attention to it during Mass or other church activities. The priest said that he hadn't given attention to it during his homilies (sermons) because they were 'guided by fixed readings' although he admitted that it didn't prevent him from giving a more prominent role to the environment. But up to now he had decided not to give it attention during the Mass. Also, the participating Methodist church didn't have specific services for environment nor gave it attention during other church activities like bible studies. As a reason for this they explained that the Methodist Church was struggling for its own survival:

I think partly the Methodist Church is a struggling church and when you're struggling about your own survival as a church and as community that will take higher priority than those things that are a wider concern. These are often pushed a bit to the fringes I would say. And if you have few people to do the jobs around the church than these things are desirable….. but don't have an immediate impact in church life and tend to drift lower down the agenda, will that be reasonable?

Male Methodist 1

So, according to the participating Methodists, the fact they were losing members and income also caused them to have less attention to issues that might lay outside the core tasks of a church. Similarly, a female participant said that *'there are so many others topics' (Female Methodist 2)* that also need attention from the church. This decline and the effects that it had on the functioning of the whole of the Methodist Church also made some participants rather pessimistic about the

future. When the participants were discussion about ways to reduce the carbon footprint of the Methodist Church, the discussion diverted to the activities of the Church of England and its pledge to reduce its emission by 80%. One respondent replied rather cynical and said:

Over half of their churches will be closed by 2050 and therefore there will be a 50% reduction. The rest can be done by replacing normal bulbs with Led lights.

Male Methodist 1

For many Methodist participants there was always some sort of awareness that in terms of member statistics and financial forecast their wider church wasn't doing so well and as such priority tended to go towards 'running the church' rather than getting involved in all sort of environmental activities.

Also the Evangelical participants didn't give much attention to the environment during services or other church activities. Discussions about the church and the relevance of the environment to church services often steered quickly towards recycling or buying local food. But they did mention that once they had a guest speaker from A Rocha[33] during a Sunday service.

They were talking and encouraging us to do all the right things. Whatever those are, recycling, eating seasonally, the whole lot.

Evangelical Male 3

But as the quote above demonstrates, despite whatever the guest speaker from A Rocha might have said it was mostly viewed through the lens of individual responsibility by the male participant. The Evangelical Anglican Church was also in the process of buying a church building from the Methodist Church in Exeter and when group leader mentioned that is church building had a back garden where they perhaps could start growing their own vegetables other participants replied very enthusiastic. Talking about the idea of starting a vegetable garden, one female participant said:

Than you know what you put on it, you know what's coming out of it. There is something about when you actually get involved you actually value the process, how difficult it is to work in this country with the seasons and that to deal with all the nature. You know we can all collect it in the supermarket, we become detached. When God made the world He gave us everything that we needed, soil,

[33] A Rocha is an international Christian environmental organisation that is responsible for the Eco church award scheme and seeks to introduce the environment into congregations and is also involved in conservation projects. See also arocha.org.uk

plants and the resources to make our own plants, to make our own food. He didn't make this country for supermarkets.

Female Evangelical 1

Surprisingly, from all the different focus groups this comment about the vegetable garden was the only comment about practical actions that didn't involve individual behaviour or more wishful political oriented actions. It was the only time that participants talked about doing something locally and practically as a faith community. The idea of having a vegetable garden at their future church made participants very enthusiastic. It did not only provide the church with an opportunity to get involved in environmental issues and bring 'Creation' closer to the churchgoers, all the participants were also very interested in just the practical aspects. Experiencing the sowing, growing and harvesting themselves rather than buying something in the supermarket was seen as something very positive and it is likely that for the people who will work in the vegetable garden that for them the positive effects will not be limited to working together as a community and having appreciation for the environment but working in the vegetable garden might very well also make their individual lifestyle more sustainable[34]. As such the vegetable garden can very well be an educational tool to teach the church about the beauty of the natural world and the importance of using local products and also enabling churchgoers to just enjoy nature.

As already mentioned before the Liberal Anglican church was the only focus group whereby the participants all emphasised the importance of collective action. However, although acknowledging the importance of collective action they also found it really difficult to find ways to become active as a church. They felt that is was really hard for their church or for any faith group that matter to instigate any practical collective action.

A Catholic Church can act corporately in the sense that the Pope can get up and say something but it doesn't mean that it actually happens that way, does it? For many other churches it is actually extraordinary difficult, for the other religions too.

Anglican Male 2

Even though the participants said that more collective action needed to happen, they didn't really how to do that. Because according to them '*churches are not very*

[34] Being in nature and experiencing nature has been shown by much research to have very positive impact on how connected people feel with nature, the willingness of people to address environmental problems and being in nature also has a positive effect on (mental) health (see for example Mayer et al 2009; Tyrväinen et al 2014; Bratman et al 2015; Berman et al 2012; Russell et al 2013; Nisbet et al 2009; Nisbet et al 2011; Zylstra et al 2014).

good at lobbying' and focus only on lobbying for *'very specific religious issues, like priests or homosexuality, stuff like that' (Anglican Male 2)*. So, they felt that the Church of England wasn't really interested in putting the environment in the spotlight and start lobbying for the environment. Interesting thing about this complaint is that these participants do reject a strong focus on personal behaviour but instead focus strongly on politics and lobbying at a national and perhaps even international level. Other options that are less linked to politics and more locally oriented like a vegetable garden are not discussed. As such the participating Liberal Anglican church seems to be stuck although it clearly wanted to move away from personal behaviour but didn't really have anywhere to go. Although the Evangelical participants seem to be firmly holding on to their focus on individual lifestyle improvements, they also discovered opportunities get more practically involved as a community. Like other participating churches the Liberal Anglican church didn't give specific attention to the environment during services. However, participants were very quick to point out that:

We don't have church services about environment but then we don't have churches services about sin or sexuality or about money, there are all sorts of things that we do not. We don't focus on them but it doesn't mean they are not there or are not sort of involved or not appearing in different shapes or forms.

Anglican Male 3

So, although there was no specific attention for the environment this didn't mean that is was ignored. Participants told that during intersessions (church prayers) there was frequent attention to the environment and the church also had a bi-monthly book club that sometimes reads books about the environment. The church had also attempted during the restoration of one of their churches to install solar panels on its roof but unfortunately *'English Heritage wasn't very keen'* according to the priest and also the architect and others had objections and even argued that solar panels wouldn't be cost efficient as such no solar panels were placed on the roof of that particular church building. This was very disappointing for many of the participants and according to the priest, nowadays *'we haven't got resources for solar panels'* (Anglican priest, female).

With all the participating churches there was no specific attention for the environment during services or other church activities. Often it just wasn't happening and there were no anti-environmental feeling or theological objections involved. The environment was often focused on individualistic concern that was being addressed with lifestyle changes. There are challenges to this approach, especially by the Liberal Anglican participants but they too struggled to find a workable approach that would go beyond individual behaviour. The only more

collective action was by the participants of Evangelical Anglican Church who were considering starting a vegetable garden[35].

5.10: The Eco-church

The now following section will discuss the eco-church. This section will argue that although the eco-church approach is not flawless it does give the environment a much prominent with the church life of the eco-church.

The eco-church approach is a scheme that is run by the faith-based organisation A Rocha. Whereas Green Christian engages mostly with environmentally concerned Christians and also aims to engage with secular environmental groups, A Rocha mostly is focused on helping churches to engage with environment through the use of the eco-church scheme. The eco-church scheme provides a church with a clear set of goals which if they are met by the church are being rewarded with a bronze, silver or gold award. The process to become an eco-church starts out by filling in a survey about what the church is currently doing about the environment[36]. The questions cover all the different aspects through which a church might engage with environment. These are: teaching and worship (does your church pray for creation?), the building (lots of questions about insulation and electricity), the land owned by the church (does the church maintain native wildflowers?), community and global engagement (does your church organise a green fair?) and lastly lifestyle questions (is your church encouraging the reduction of car usage?). After filling in all the questions a score is awarded and after gaining a certain amount of points an award is given, with gold needing the most points. By rewarding the efforts with an award, A Rocha hopes that churches will be encouraged to improve themselves and not just gain a bronze award but also go further and improve their lifestyle even more, organise more environmental activities and give more space to wildlife and attain a silver and eventually a gold award. As such the eco-scheme provides very clear instructions on what to do, especially when for example a church struggles to engage with environment as a community. The eco-church is this thesis has had a bronze award since 2010 but has not yet moved on to gaining silver or gold.

[35] The 'starting' aspect needs to be strongly emphasised. It was a suggestion of the group leader and other participants seemed very enthusiastic but it was also just an idea and everything still needs to be agreed upon by the wider church leadership and if they agree with the idea it will still be uncertain whether people are still interested and willing to participate when the vegetable garden is finally a reality.

[36] The survey can be found here: https://3ak4be4522es3y5i4l2cwfkx-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Eco-Church-Survey-v2-January-2018.pdf But it can also be found on website of A Rocha (https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/)

5.10.1: Making space for the environment

Since it wasn't possible to have a focus group with the eco-church it remains quite hard to fully understand the eco-church but from the interviews with one churchgoer, the person responsible for helping the church gain its eco-church status and informal conversations with other churchgoers it was possible to get some very valuable insights.

Like the earlier discussed Anglican evangelical church also the eco-church adhered to an Evangelical theology (the church is a member of the Evangelical Alliance) and its worship services are more charismatically oriented. According to the leader of eco-church related activities the theology that is practiced at the church fits the label of a 'free Evangelical church'. Also in its eco-theology the members of the eco-church seem to resemble to Anglican Evangelical church and put a lot of emphasis on stewardship. When the churchgoer who was interviewed was asked how he related caring for environment to his Christian faith, he replied by saying:

Somebody (God) who loved us more than anyone gave us something really precious that He had created. Why would you stump all over it?

Male member, eco-church

But this churchgoer also emphasised that caring for the environment for him also came for out a desire to care for those affected by environmental problems as droughts, flooding and changing climates are threatening the livelihood of millions of people around the world.

Part of loving our neighbour is looking after our shared environment. It is an important part of loving our neighbour because we see an increasing frequency of disasters around the world than, that's affecting people very badly.

Male member, eco-church

Others members and churchgoers seem to agree with these perspectives as they too would emphasise that they were guardians, custodians or stewards over creation or they talked about the human tragedies that often accompany issues like climate change or deforestation.

However, the leader who was responsible for gaining the eco-church status didn't use the stewardship prospective. According to him:

The stewardship talk is a little bit unhelpful because it regards nature as a resource to be exploited whereas in scripture it is created to reveal the glory of God.

Leader, eco-church

Instead he was seeking to move away from an anthropocentric view of creation. He strongly stressed that the bible and its story of salvation is not just about a relationship between God and humans but that the rest of creation is also part of God's salvation. According to him it is about *'the salvation of the whole of creation not just the human bit is of importance to God'* (Leader, eco-church). He strongly believed that *'Christ is redeeming the whole of creation'* but he also accepted that stewardship *'is a concept that a lot of people at (Church X) understand and you can get a lot of traction'*. As such stewardship was still being used at the church but he was also sometimes challenging churchgoers about the role of creation when he was delivering a sermon.

From the interviews and informal conversations that I had with participants, it seems that the 'eco-church' approach does manage to bring the environment much more prominently into church life, but things were still far perfect. Although the eco-church does give extensive attention to the environment during church services and other activities it was also still a novel topic for churchgoers and some tended to see the environment as one the many things that people can get involved in at church. A woman, who is in her 80's and who helped me to set up contacts for my research, explained that she decided not to attend the focus group because she felt that she knew very little about the subject and as such thought that she had nothing to say during the focus group. Another female with school going children, explained that everybody is involved in their own 'thing' at church, hers was children's work and outreach to international students and therefore not the environment. Also, some churchgoers (university students) were unaware of the fact that the church had the status of an eco-church. When they were shown the eco church award (which hangs near the entrance of the church) they were somewhat surprised but some were also a bit indifferent. The church also has a special section on its website dedicated to 'environmental concern'. However, most of this content is several years old and a number of related links on the website are no longer working[37]. Also, a link to a Facebook group which was set up to encourage car sharing seemed to be no longer working. At the same time, there was according to the church leader little resistance against becoming an eco-church. He estimated around 20% of the people attending the church had been sceptical about the idea of becoming an eco-church and they thought that it would

[37] Nowadays the eco-church has a new website and all the environmental resources have not returned to the new website. The website only mentions that they have 'an eco-church bronze award' now. However, they do have a new 'Eco-Action' Facebook group with 28 members. Most posts in this group are related to local 'green events' or interesting articles from websites.

be too expensive or they expressed doubt about climate science. Another 20% were really keen on becoming an eco-church while 60% were *'sort of interested and thought it was good but were more involved in other issues'* as the church leader put it. But according to him nowadays most scepticism had disappeared. And, although the resources on the website are a few years old already, it is still much better and much more extensive in comparison with the other churches. There were especially lots of resources for children and families. These resources contained more bible focused materials such as bible studies about creation but also tips about reducing waste or calculating your carbon footprint. During several Sunday services in the past 'creation' was the topic of the sermon and there is an active 'eco-action team' within the church. The eco-church also organises events where speakers are invited to talk about faith and the environment. For example a well-known Christian professor of agriculture, who frequently speaks about faith and environmental issues, spoke at the church in 2017. Also the church leader himself gave occasionally sermons about eco-theology at the church. Other activities that the church had organised were for example prayer breakfasts on the role of supermarkets, the making of their own communion bread and farm visits. Children and youth were educated about the environment during Sunday school. Another thing that the eco-church did was publish 'green tips' in the church newsletter. These tips were in the form of personal stories about church members who for example had switched energy supplier or had put solar panels on their roof. According to the church leader such tips with personal stories really helped people think about taking actions themselves and the eco-church had also conducted a survey among its members which showed that when it came to 'greening' their lifestyle *'support from the church led to making a difference'* according to the church leader. The other churches had no such resources or activities and did not invite speakers. So, compared with the other churches in this thesis there was much more engagement with the environment in the eco-church.

5.10.2: Still struggling with moving beyond individual behaviour

However, the eco-church also seemed to have the same problems as the other participating churches. Namely, a struggle to go beyond stimulating individual behavioural change. In the eco-church there was teaching about what the bible tells about the environment, the church building was being made more sustainable and people were encouraged to recycle and reduce their emissions but going beyond individual actions was also problematic for eco-church. Within the eco-church there was lots of attention for teaching and preaching on the environment but in terms of practical things that churchgoers were doing within the church or the wider community, most things were rather narrowly focused in individual lifestyles. The church leader openly admitted that most practical actions were done by churchgoers themselves through the 'greening' of their personal lifestyles. *'Most of the practical action is through the lives of the people who worship with us'* as he

put it. However, the church leader linked the cause of this lack of practical action to the lack of green space around the church and also the young age of the church building which already made it already rather green and sustainable. As such there were very little opportunities to get practically involved at church according to him. However, this way of thinking seems to forget about the role that churches could potentially play within the wider society when practically addressing environmental issues. For the other interviewee the problem was more complex. The male interviewee was very well aware of the strong focus on personal behaviour but he also didn't have a solution for it. Talking about the strong focus on individual behaviour he said:

When it comes to something like climate change it can do actions like making the isolation of the building is good and encouraging it's congregation to make individually take actions to make sure that their impact on the world is limited. But actually, when you think what can a group of people, locally based do make the climate a world a better place? Something like a foodbank or something like mission work or things like street pastors, they are very locally based and involve groups of people working together that something were such, you know, is playing to its strength by being a locally based team of people. Something like climate change there's a limited benefit in the same way. I think that actually, the actions that need to happen are on a very big scale by big organisations or governments or they are very much on individual scale where we need to make own decisions in life that need to be……. You know, our impact on the world. But for example, I couldn't see that having a group of people from a church going out into the community, you know we can't go out as a group and make them a little bit greener. It doesn't seem quite as obvious a link but you can see how a team of people working very locally with within the community can have an impact in such ways.

Male member, eco-church

From the quote above it clear that the participant struggled to find a role for the church. He knew what individuals could do and he knew what political actions needed to be taken but what role the churches should take or any more locally based organisation for that matter, he wasn't so sure. The participant perceived that were was a large gap between individual actions like recycling and switching to green electricity on one hand and national or even international political decision making processes with little in between. Issues like homelessness or foodbanks are issues that fit churches really well because they are local, practical and can be done together. But that's not the case with environmental problems according to him. For him environmental problems had to be solved a by mix of individual actions and (inter)national agreements about for example the reduction of emissions or the banning of certain types of pesticides. He couldn't really find a

role for organisations or groups who worked at a local or perhaps regional level as the actions needed to be taken at either the personal or (inter)national scale. So, according to him, churches and also other faith based groups are not working on the right level or scale to be involved in environmental issues as a community. As such he stated that:

The best way that the church could be part of the solution is to encourage churchgoers to see that their own actions. The problem of the environmental action basis is that everyone is making their own little contribution, you don't see an actual result. When you decide to pay extra and take instead of normal electricity 100% renewable resourced energy you pay more money but in practice you don't see any difference. So, where are you paying that extra for? I suppose helping people to more understand their moral obligations and that sort of thing, the church has a role to play in that. But then, I suppose, the church has an important role to play in not just to tell us about it. There are plenty of groups who do that but do that from a specific Christian point of view.

Male member, eco-church

The role that the participant envisioned for the churches is one of encouraging and stimulating churchgoers to take action and make their own life more sustainable. For him the thing that churches can do is helping people to understand their moral obligations and making them see the need to change their lifestyle. As such he seems to place much emphasis on the teaching of the believers about the importance of the environment and its relevance to their faith. However, it also confines itself to individual lifestyle improvements that the other participating churches without an eco-status have also emphasised. The focus remained on making people change their private behaviour. It gives an almost classical or perhaps stereotypical impression of a church telling people that they are doing wrong and that they have to change in the way that the church tells them to do. When trying to explore with the respondent whether there were any more local ways to get the church involved we came across the idea of participating in a local energy community. Some churches have been part of church initiatives and I asked the participant whether something like that would be interesting for his church.

D: Do you think that (Church X) could be involved in such things?
EcoM: I think (Church X) could, yeah….I don't know if I'm convinced if that's the best use of…..don't know….. I still think that some of these things can still better be done by government but then you can say the same thing about foodbanks. But we live in a place where the government isn't doing that so perhaps we should take direct action. I suppose (Church X) could set up its own little solar farm

somewhere. What is that going to be doing? Is that going to be making electricity?..... It all goes into a grid and we have to pay high fees.

Although acknowledging that potentially a local energy community could be something for the eco-church, he still remained rather sceptical, also about the idea of energy communities in general and preferred such jobs to be taken up by the government. The participant still felt that the best use of resources, time and money by churches was through stimulating more sustainable behaviour among the members of the church. For him churches weren't suited for the personal actions or the political actions that are required when it comes to addressing environmental issues.

Although this participant from the eco-church was the only participant who explicitly mentioned this issue it might very be the case that other participants were experiencing the same issue. Participating churches focused on behavioural change and also talked about the more political underlying causes but no church, apart from the discussion of the vegetable garden among participants of the Evangelical church, focused on other things than behavioural change or politics. As such only the personal and (inter)national ways of addressing environmental problems were explored. Both the personal and national are quite difficult to engage with as a group while changing behaviour is something that can be encouraged by churches but it is also something that ultimately people have decide by themselves. While politics can up to a certain degree be done together, for example organising an evening with the local MP churches are often rather hesitant to show any kind of political preference, also due to polarised atmosphere regarding especially climate change. Others more local and community oriented approaches were often not really mentioned. As such it seems likely that churches will struggle to find an approach that suits them. With homelessness or foodbanks churches see themselves as ideally situated within the community and as having lots of local networks through which they can help with these problems. However, with environmental problems they perceive the problems to be located on the individual or at the (inter) national level and for churches getting involved at these levels is much harder. Participating churches did not seem to pay much attention to the many possible ways of engagement between the personal and (inter) national. With earlier mentioned vegetable garden was the only mentioned local alternative. But vegetable gardens or community gardening could potentially be viable options for churches. The Evangelical Anglican Church was already enthusiastic about the idea of a vegetable garden as soon as the group leader proposed the idea. Such a garden can be located on the property of the church but often churches have little or no own ground and taking part in wider community garden initiatives could be a very good alternative. Local (vegetable) garden initiatives won't directly lead to improved environmental regulations being passed in parliament nor will it lead to a

nationwide switch to renewable energy but it does provide churches with opportunities to come together as a church and act a community and experience the environment directly and learn about its gifts and benefits. So, although taking part in a community garden project might not directly have direct effect on the reduction of emissions or the amount of food waste but participating in community garden projects will lead to people being more willing to change their own lifestyle or lobby or protest for new environmental regulations and as an added bonus participants might feel less stressed and more happy. So, eventually, churches and secular communities groups who work together might also prove to be influential players in the local politics.

However, despite being critical I think that it is important to emphasise that the eco-church approach is also to a large extent successful. The participating eco-church had much more resources and activities about the environment and really engaged its churchgoers on environmental issues. The other participating churches were all lagging far behind compared with the eco-church. The environment had gained a visible place within church life through the eco-church approach. But the important thing with the eco-church approach is that the whole process needs to be done together as a church. If everything is done by small committee that is made up of the scientists and activists who attend the church and the rest of the church membership isn't engaged very much then the environment will remain an uninteresting and politically contested topic that bears little relevance to the Christian faith. However, if the wider church is involved than the eco-church approach can present a fruitful way to link faith with the environment. The only downside is that gaining the eco-church status takes a considerable amount of time, money and volunteers and for churches with a small membership or financial struggles it might proof too much to do.

5.11: Crossovers with other groups

Participating in for example community garden initiatives will likely mean that churches have to participate in wider (secular) community gardening initiatives as they won't have the outdoor space or time that is needed to run such initiatives. However, during the focus groups it also became clear that the participating churches see many similarities and shared goals between themselves and other groups who don't have a Christian background but nevertheless are concerned about the environment. Apart from the Evangelicals all the participating churches saw similarities and possibilities for collaboration. The Evangelical participants weren't explicitly against it but they never talked about similarities between them and other non- Christian or secular groups as other participants did. When talking about giving stuff away or bringing things to charity shops the Catholic priest remarked:

It's interesting many people live like that. They are not Christians. Lots of atheists live like that, lots of Buddhists live like that and in fact Buddhists are much better at it and have been much better at it since like forever. So, it's really interesting that in terms of faith motivating it, because actually it is just a sort of common sense about the environment that we find ourselves in. I think… It's actually just common sense to not do that. You don't need all this stuff or whatever.

Catholic priest

This theme of caring for the environment as being related to common sense rather than some kind of a faith based motivation popped up several times during the focus group with the Catholics. Shortly after the remarks by the Catholic priest the topic changed to reducing food waste during which the priest stated that he intended to no longer throw things away from his fridge. A female participant asked him whether he did it because of his faith or whether he wanted to save money.

FC1: But is that linked to your faith or it saves your pocket or…..
CP: It makes sense….
FC1: That's right…..
CP: It makes human sense… (laughs).

The Catholic priest also said during the focus group that:

There are lots of atheists and people of no faith or others faiths that do exactly the same things, recycle, conscious of the environment, some are much better at it. There are some really good Christians who are very conscious about the environment and there are some Christians who don't give a monkey about the environment and there are probably some Hindus or whatever…..

Catholic priest

The two quotes above emphasise that many non- Christians share the same concerns about the planet as the Catholics do and also that it all seems like 'common sense' rather than based on a particular faith based commandment. Trying to protect the environment is a logical thing to do, regardless of someone's faith background. Faith is not a prerequisite to be willing to protect the environment and as such there were no theological barriers that seem to withhold Catholic participants from seeking opportunities to collaborate. Similarly, the liberal Anglican participants also argued that it doesn't matter what faith you have as long as you care for the environment and want to protect it. It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you have:

A sort of feeling that yeah the earth is a precious thing…..I don't think that's a particular religious thing, it can be shared by people who also have no religious beliefs at all. But equally it can be. So, that is quite an important common denominator. And I suppose that I'm trying to find what common denominator are over the environment, that is actually quite an important issue in trying to work out, what to do and how to galvanise people' involvement in new ways

Anglican Male 1

According to another male participant this common denominator is acknowledging that the environment has intrinsic value.

That seeking to understand the intrinsic value of as far as the biosphere is concerned, of other creatures, other animals when we talk about the rain forest or the whale or whatever. Intrinsic value, not just an instrumental value and I don't think that necessarily arises from having religious faith. I can understand some people saying, I'm a Christian…. Christianity says we should care for Creation, therefore I care for Creation. For me it's the other way round or it's not that direction in that case. The environment, individual animals, species are intrinsically… have intrinsic value and it so happens that there are strands of Christianity which affirm that…… The earth has value in its own right

Anglican Male 2

For liberal Anglican participants the important thing is that people acknowledge the intrinsic value of the whole of nature. If people are willing to accept that nature has intrinsic value than it doesn't matter what faith background you have because there is a common denominator that allows everyone to see and agree upon the fact that the environment is valuable in its own right and worth protecting for its own sake. From this shared principle of intrinsic value people could start to discover common interests and concerns across different groups or faith. For the participants from the Methodist church argue that both the principle of stewardship and the idea of caring for others are present are most other religions as well. They saw such principles as grounds through which they can find shared concerns about the environment and possibly collaborate with other faith groups. Within the context it is also important to emphasise that participants did not just engage with environmental problems because of their Christian faith but are also feel an urge to address environmental problems because they are very much aware of the scientific underpinnings of climate change and other environmental problems.

I mean climate change is proved beyond any doubt if you look at all the scientific evidence. Never mind what Christians say or if it's God's will, nonsense.

Anglican Male 3

You don't need to be a scientist to notice that we had a string of the hottest years that we have ever had. And actually a lot of things that I care about and what I like about the world are going to be gone.

Male member, eco-church

Both liberal Anglican and Catholic participants don't explicitly say that they could collaborate with other non- Christian groups, they are only outlining common values and environmental concerns but there seems to be potential for crossover narratives about the intrinsic value of the natural world. Common sense is harder to turn into a coherent narrative through which people can find shared concerns but it does indicate that participants are open to others with different or no faith backgrounds. So, from their statements it seems like some participating churches are willing to consider, or at least acknowledge that there is a possibility to form collaborations between different faith and non-faith groups on shared values and concerns that they have about the environment. As such perhaps postsecular rapprochement (Cloke & Beaumont 2012) could take place between these churches and secular environmental groups. However, there is one very important thing that needs to change before any such possibility can become a reality. Currently, all these churches are struggling to go beyond individual behaviour. If churches are only focused on individuals and only seek to improve behaviour there is little reason why churches and environmental groups should be collaborating in the first place as all focus is on private behaviour rather than collective action. There is little benefit from working together if they only seek to improve the individual rather than the collective. However, if churches want to go beyond individual behaviour and want to seek societal change and want to get involved in protesting or lobbying and taking part in community garden initiatives, in that case forming partnerships with other groups could be very good and probably a necessary step. So, collaborating across the religious-secular divide will be very useful but it can only be useful if churches move beyond improving behaviour. However, it needs to be emphasised that is for the most part the possibilities of postsecular collaboration because for now to a large degree speculation as none of participating churches is actually involved in such partnerships.

5.12: Conclusion

In the second chapter of this thesis it was argued that many scholars, activists and media have great hopes for involved of churches. But this second chapter also argued that there are very little research looking at how churches engaged with the environment. As such this fifth chapter decided to explore how local engage with the environment. From the research findings presented in this chapter it is clearly that all the participating churches are concerned about the state of the environment and use stewardship, caring for others and interconnectedness to argue that they

have a commitment to care and protect the environment. However, the participating churches are also struggling to incorporate environmental issues within their church life. Scholars and environmental activists might have high expectations about religious institutions but the churches that were included in this study are mostly focusing on individual behaviour and although to go beyond it struggle to do so. Their concerns and theological incentives to protect creation don't turn these churches into the new and influential players that academics and activists have hoped. However, this doesn't mean that these churches are merely following the dominant path of individual behaviour and don't try to challenge the cultural and social forces that shape individual behaviour. In fact all participating churches argue that they see as a need to challenge to the underlying attitudes towards consumption, materialism and economic growth. However, the problem is that all the participating churches are struggling to put these concerns into action. As such, this chapter has expressed very serious doubt about the enthusiasm of the media, scholars and activits that were discussed in the chapter. It argued that by so strongly focusing on individual behaviour churches and churchgoers would not be able to meet the high expectations that many scholars, activists and media have. This because they perceive churches as communities that work together and address environmental problems as a collective rather than as places where individuals can be taught to 'green' their lives. However, this chapter also argued that there still is a clear understanding among churchgoers that they need to go beyond the individual. During the focus groups participants made clear political statement from time to time but no church has been involved in politics. Although they want change society they don't see many possibilities to work on that change as a community of believers. Only the Evangelical Anglican Church found through a vegetable garden on their church ground a way to become more locally involved in environmentally issues. Although, a garden initiative by itself won't be able to reduce emissions or make politicians take climate change more seriously, it does provide a local opportunity for churches to get involved with others and educate people about the environment and the need to protect it. In order to achieve such an ambitious idea, churches will have to collaborate with other non-religious groups and step away from their strong individualistic focus. Churches have to become involved as a community rather than as separate individuals because at the moment all the participating churches are full of people who are seeking to protect the environment but they are severely limited by a strong focus on individual behaviour. However if this focus is replaced with a focus whereby church members engage together than they can have an impact that goes way beyond the individual and this can make a much needed contribution to the addressing of environmental problems.

Chapter 6:
Living out a radical green Christian faith

Some parts of this chapter have also heavily modified appeared in:

Harmannij, D (2019) Is It Possible to Give Environmental Issues a More Prominent Role in Church Life?. In: Leal Filho W, Consorte McCrea, A (eds) Sustainability and the Humanities. Cham: Springer
https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-95336-6_6

6.1: Introduction

This is the second empirical chapter of the thesis and it focuses specifically on environmentally concerned Christians. In the previous chapter the focus was on how congregations engage with the environment and in this chapter the findings of the previous chapter will be compared with the findings of research among Christians who have specifically chosen to give the environment a very prominent place within their faith and their wider life. As already explained in the methodology chapter, to study environmentally concerned Christian, research was done with members and supporters of the faith-based environmental group 'Green Christian'. As such within the context of this thesis environmentally concerned Christians in most cases means members and supporters of Green Christian. With members this thesis means paying members of Green Christian while supporters are those who receive the newsletter and/or prayer guide but are not paying members themselves. The term 'environmentally concerned Christians' is also used to describe the same group but also includes others without direct links to Green Christian but who share a similar conviction that the caring and protecting the environment is an important part of their Christian faith. The chapter focuses on the second and third sub-research questions. Namely:

'How do environmentally concerned Christians relate with the environment and how is this relationship turned into action? And in what ways is this different compared with 'ordinary churchgoers'?

And:

'What difficulties are environmentally concerned Christians experiencing? And how are environmentally concerned Christians finding a shared concern for the environment with their fellow believers'?

Just as in the previous chapter there will also be some attention for postsecularity but ideas surrounding postsecularity in relation to environmental issues will be discussed much more in-depth in the third and final empirical chapter. The aim for this chapter is to fully understand how environmentally concerned Christians relate and engage with the environment and how they seek to engage their fellow believers with their concerns for the planet. As already written in earlier chapters environmentally concerned Christians have gained lots of interest from environmental groups and academics that see these believers as very promising allies in the fight against a whole host of environmental problems. But just was the case with congregations, there is little known about these environmentally concerned Christians. The few books and articles that exist are almost exclusively American (see Feldman & Moseley 2003; Smith & Pulver 2009; Billings & Samson

2012; Witt 2016) although Nita (2014; 2016) has done research within the UK context but environmentally concerned Christians remain a mostly unstudied group of people. The American studies highlight how environmental concerns often seem to clash with Evangelical (political) beliefs and how some environmentally concerned Christians are seeking to overcome this divide (Billings & Samson 2012; Witt 2016). American studies also argue that Christian environmental groups focus long term change in values, behaviour and morals rather than focusing on specific policy goals such as banning polluting vehicles from city centres (Feldman & Moseley 2003; Smith & Pulver 2009). The work by Nita emphasises how faith based environmental activists feel that they don't belong anywhere. They are seen as too green to be religious by their fellow believers while being too religious to be green for non-religious activists. But there is a still a lot to be researched and understood about these environmentally concerned Christian especially with regards to how they interact with their local church, how religious beliefs interacts with the deeply political implications of environmental concern and how faith-based motivations are being aligned with scientific and other secular arguments.

6.2: Outline of Chapter

6.2.1: The environment as essential part of the Christian faith

What will follow now is a short outline for the rest of the chapter. Firstly, it will be argued that many environmentally concerned Christians have been interested and involved in environmental issues for a very long time and that they are deeply concerned about the current state of the planet. Just like the focus groups there is focus on stewardship and caring for neighbours, but environmentally concerned Christians are also going beyond those concepts. They seek new environmental focused interpretations of well-known bible verses and they extend the concept of 'caring for your neighbour' to non-humans. It will emphasise how environmental problems are seen as spiritual problems and that for environmentally concerned Christians addressing environmental problems is more than finding scientific solutions or formulating the appropriate financial incentive to stimulate sustainable behaviour and that addressing environmental problems requires a deep and lasting change in society. It will also be emphasised that within this 'green faith' there are elements visible that seem to resemble conversion in the sense that the Green Christian message is often positioned as something different and distinct from the 'mainstream' Christian message but also as a much-needed message that will transform Christians.

6.2.2: Struggles and Difficulties

Secondly, the chapter will discuss environmentally concerned Christians in relation to their own congregation. It will highlight the struggles and difficulties that many face when they attempt to engage their congregation on environmental issues. Indifference, inaction and even denial are faced by many when they talk about environmental issues in their churches. Another hurdle which makes it difficult for environmentally concerned Christians to engage congregations about the environment is the ongoing decline of institutionalised Christianity. Congregations are ageing and numerically declining and this makes it hard to get involved in any issue. It will be emphasised that such the indifference and denial and the ongoing decline of institutionalised Christianity temper the high expectations that many have with regards to faith-based environmentalism. However, by using examples from the fieldwork done with members and supporters of Green Christian a solution for the indifference and inaction will be proposed in this chapter. It will also be argued that due to the inaction, resistance and lack of perceived support within their own congregation, environmentally concerned Christians often feel isolated within their own congregation and for them Green Christian as provides a space where they find understanding, support and fellowship.

6.2.3: Sincere Religious Faith and Caring for the environment

Lastly, there will be discussions about the links between Christianity and wanting to address environmental problems and why environmentally concerned Christians seem to be so pessimistic and seemingly encountering so many problems while with the focus groups none of such things seemed to happen. About the relationship between faith and the environment it will be argued that faith itself doesn't make a believer 'green' but rather faith works through other factors. If people believe things like the scientific underpinnings of environmental problems, had a green upbringing and are left leaning than faith can provide a strong faith-based incentive to address environmental problems. However, if people are for example sceptical about the science, prefer individual freedom over collective action and are more right leaning than the opposite can happen, and faith can provide a strong faith-based incentive that downplays environmental problems and stimulates opposition to environmental action. For the question as to why there are such stark differences between environmentally concerned Christians and the participants of the focus groups, several explanations will be discussed, and the role of local clergy will also be emphasised. Finally, there will be a conclusion.

6.3: Green Christian as an organisation

For this part of the thesis the focus will be on the members and supporters of the faith-based environment organisation 'Green Christian'. As already mentioned in the methodology chapter, Green Christian is a national organisation whose origin

goes back to 1982 when it was founded by a group of Christians who were attending the Ecology Party conference (as the Green Party was called back then) and this group of Ecology Party members founded 'Christian Ecology Link' and sought to form a bridge between churches and the wider green movement. Although the name was later changed to Green Christian the desire to bring to churches and the environmental movement closer together has always remained. In its 2016/2017 annual report Green Christian stated that it wants to be a *'bridge between folk in the green movement and in the Churches'* and in its vision statement it writes that Green Christian aims to firstly: *'offer insights into ecology and the environment to Christian people and churches*' and secondly, '*To offer Christian insights to the Green movement'*. As such Green Christian desires to be a bridge builder between churches and the wider green movement but it is important to add that there are no official links between the Green Party and Green Christian. However, Green Christian does see large overlaps between the goal of the green movement and Christian teachings and sees bringing Christians and the green movement together as an important step towards addressing environmental problems.

Apart from having roots within the Ecology Party and seeking to build bridges, Green Christian is also an explicitly Christian organisation that openly professes its Christian faith and is ecumenical in nature. It draws members from wide range of churches and these members all share a deep concern for the current state of the natural environment. Although it doesn't have an official doctrine which members must sign or adhere to it does provide a theological outline of what is described as the 'Basis of Faith' in its vision statement. This outline reads:

We affirm our belief in God as Creator of all things and in Jesus Christ as Lord, looking to the Holy Spirit for guidance through the Scriptures, and seeking to hear Him in the challenges of the present time.

Green Christian Vision Statement (2018)

So, although Green Christian doesn't belong to a specific denomination it does have an explicit Christian foundation and is firmly focused on Christians and although seeking to build bridges between the wider green movement and churches it is first and foremost an organisation that is focused on Christians. Green Christian itself is volunteer-led and is led by a group of trustees. Apart from the specific aim of forming a bridge between Christianity, Green Christian as an organisation has three broad goals:

1) Providing a supportive community for environmentally concerned Christians and providing them with opportunities and resources to study about Christianity and the environment, to integrate the environment into their

prayer and worship life and to strengthen the community of environmentally concerned Christians.
2) Reaching out to other Christians and churches to tell them out the importance of the environment to their faith.
3) Challenging churches and Christians to make radical changes in their lives and the wider society. This challenge is also extended to non-Christians.

For these three goals Green Christians organises different types of activities and produces different materials. For the first goal, Green Christian organises workshops across England where people can learn about faith and the environment and where they can meet other Christians who are also concerned about the environment. Green Christian also organises an annual retreat around a theme where members can learn and meet each other for a whole weekend. It needs to be emphasised that because Green Christian is a relatively small organisation it only organises a limited number of events each year. During the events and the annual retreats members of Green Christian form lasting friendship but in recent years Green Christian has sought to explicitly strengthen the relationships between individual members because Green Christian itself is only a small organisation while members are living across the UK. Therefore, Green Christian has started up 'The Way of Life Community' of which members can become companions. The idea is that companions can support and encourage other each other through friendship, advice and prayers so that everyone has support around him or her while trying to live the 'Green Christian way of life'. This 'Way of Life' approach is much wider than fostering companionship among members (it also includes public action, prayer and devotion and 'living gently') but an important aspect of Way of Life is creating a support network of members who can support and encourage each other as it can be very difficult to be concerned about the environment within the context of the local congregation (more on this later on in the chapter). Green Christian also publishes a prayer guide, a magazine and a variety of leaflets and worship resources that people can use for themselves or in their church.

With regards to the second goal Green Christian has always encouraged its members to tell others about the organisation and to distribute Green Christian materials in churches. Green Christian sees reaching out Christians as something very important because for them the environment is central to the Christian faith and they are deeply concerned about the planet. To reach out the non-members Green Christian publishes annually a flyer called 'Storm of Hope' which seeks to introduce the organisation to other Christians and recently it has started to organise regional meetings that are called 'On the Road Together'. These meetings are aimed at people who are interested in the work and seek to introduce the activities and goals of Green Christian to new people. The third goal seeks to

go beyond the Christian community and instigate change in the wider society. This is done through the project 'Joy in Enough' and within this project Green Christian is collaborating with various other groups, including non-Christians. The goal of this 'Joy in Enough' project is to challenge society into stepping away from a consumer driven society that is focused on economic growth and materialism and instead, Green Christian argues we should have 'joy in enough'. The project Joy in Enough is still very new but Green Christian has high expectations because it's the first time that Green Christian directly collaborates with secular groups and addresses an issue that explicitly engages with issues beyond environmental issues.

Green Christian itself doesn't focus on specific issues like stopping a particular fracking project or lobbying for a ban on single use plastic bags but rather Green Christian seeks to achieve long term change within churches and individual believers by making people realise the importance and centrality of the environment to the Christian faith and that problems like climate change or air pollution are not merely scientific problems or political issues but that they are also deeply religious problems and that addressing environmental problems is not only necessary from a scientific or societal point of view but also from a faith based point of view. The goal of Green Christian is to achieve long lasting change in attitudes and behaviour through bringing faith and the environment closer together and to provide a community where they can learn and support each other. This doesn't mean that individual members aren't protesting against fracking in particular places or writing their MP's about specific policies but rather as an organisation Green Christian is committed to achieving lasting change that goes beyond specific issues. This goal of long term change with the lives of people and also society as a whole is something that other researchers have so found in other Christian environmental groups (Feldman & Moseley 2003; Smith & Pulver 2009; Kidwell et al 2018).

6.4: Survey Results

6.4.1: Who are the members and supporters of Green Christian?

The three broad goals outlined above have attracted a wide range of people to Green Christians and the following section will provide a brief overview of their beliefs and characteristics before going into further analysis in the rest of the chapter. This overview is based on a survey that was distributed through the Green Christian newsletter (N=93) and provides some interesting insights in various aspects of members and supporters of Green Christian. All the data can be found in the appendix 6. Firstly, the data reveals that members and supporters of Green Christian are frequent churchgoers who believe in a personal God and come from a wide variety of denominations and theological backgrounds including from more

theologically conservative backgrounds. Secondly, it will be shown that members and supporters are overwhelmingly left wing, but it will also reveal that members and supporters of Green Christian are mostly older people and that younger people are mostly absent and that there are slightly more often females than males. Thirdly, the survey will be used to discuss some of eco-theology beliefs of the members and supporters of Green Christian. It will be argued that most members and supporters of Green Christian oppose the idea that humans rule over nature while small group of more theologically conservative respondents supports this idea and that almost all the members and supporters of Green Christian think that human interferences with nature 'produces disastrous consequences'. The survey will also show that almost everybody believes that God is present in nature and most respondents have experienced His presence. Fourthly, the survey suggests that a majority of the respondents think that the clergy in their local church are (somewhat) concerned about the environmental. It also shows that almost all respondents discuss environmental issues with their fellow churchgoers but that only a small minority of their fellow churchgoers is willing to take action. But the members and supporters of Green Christian do overwhelmingly believe that the environment should play a (much) bigger role in church life. Lastly, the survey will show that members and supporters of Green Christian want a church that doesn't avoid politics but instead is an active participant in all sorts of debates and discussions. Also they want churches to collaborate with secular groups with regards to environmental issues.

6.4.2: Loyal churchgoers from a variety of theological backgrounds

Members and supporters of Green Christian overwhelmingly believe in a personal God (78,49%; N=93) and attend worship services weekly or more (75.27%)[38] while a substantial group believes in 'some God, spirit or life force' (18.28%). Many supporters and members (n=93) are Anglican (47.31%) but there are also groups of Methodists (11.83%), Baptists (12.90%) and various other smaller denominations. However, the number of Catholics was low at just 4.30%.

[38] As already stated in the methodology chapter it is well know from social science studies that church attendance is over reported by respondents (Presser & Stinson 1998; Hadaway et al 1993; Hadaway & Marler 2005; Brenner 2011a; Rossi & Scappini 2012) but is still gives an indication of participation in institutionalised Christianity and it also gives an inside in the way that people relate and identify with Christianity (Brenner 2011b; Brenner 2012)

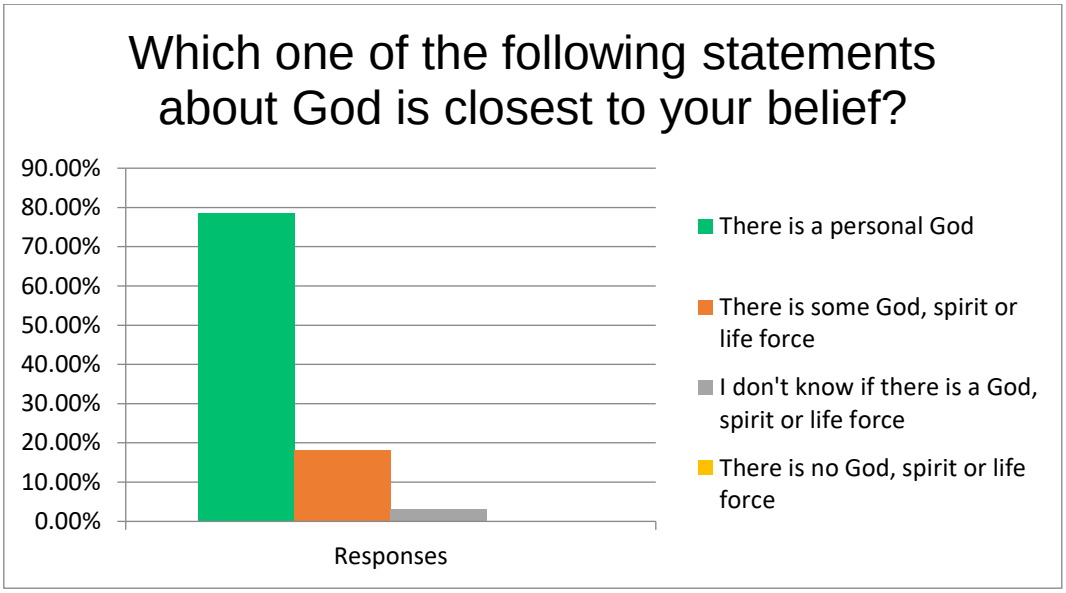

Figure 1: Which one of the following statements about God is closest to your belief?

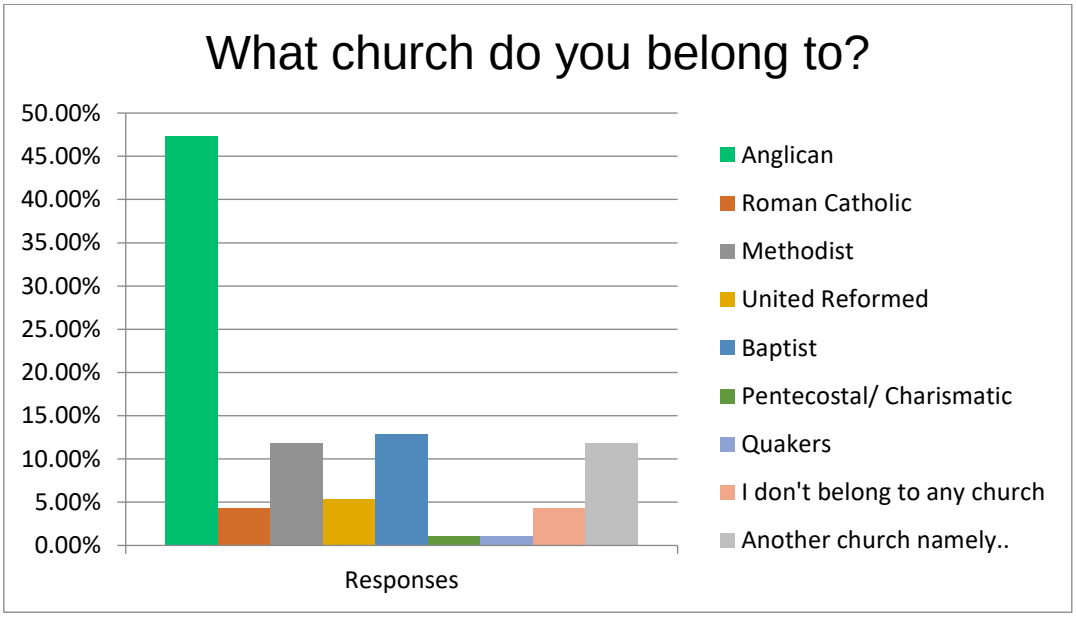

Figure 2: What church do you belong to?

As such the members and supporters of Green Christian seem to be loyal churchgoers who mostly come from the established churches. The survey also sought to find to what extend the members and supporters are liberal or conservative in their theological outlook. As already discussed in the first literature chapter, many studies, also in the UK (see Village 2015) have found negative influences from conservative theology and many of the people who oppose the idea of churches getting involved in environmental issues have likened giving more attention to environment in church to Mother Earth worship, pantheism and neo-paganism. As such there seems to be an expectation that environmentally concerned Christian adhere to a more liberal theology. To find out whether this was

true the survey asked to what extent *'The Bible is the inspired and infallible word of God'* and how much they agreed with the statement *'I do not have any objections against same sex marriage'*. These two questions but especially the second one are hotly debated questions that strongly divide those who hold conservative and those who hold liberal theological believes. As such these questions are suitable measurements of how liberal or conservative someone is in terms of theology. The survey suggests that rather than being explicitly liberal or conservative, both theological beliefs were roughly evenly present among the supporters and members of Green Christian. 51.08% of the respondents agreed that the bible was the inspired and infallible word of God while 27.17% disagreed (N=92) with a large group of 21.74% neither agreeing nor disagreeing.

	Yes, I completely agree	Yes, I agree	Neither agree nor disagree	No, I disagree	No, I strongly disagree	N
The Bible is the inspired and infallible word of God	16.30%	34.78%	21.74%	17.39%	9.78%	92

Table 2: The Bible is the inspired and infallible word of God

Of all the respondents 49.45% had no objection to same sex marriage while 29.67% did have objections and 20.78% (N=91) neither agreed nor disagreed[39]. This shows that overall the members and supporters aren't as liberal as you might expect from the literature but nor are they anywhere near uniformly conservative. Rather they reflect an ecumenical organisation is which Christians from a wide range of theological backgrounds come together to work on environmental issues.

	Yes, I completely agree	Yes, I agree	Neither agree nor disagree	No, I disagree	No, I strongly disagree	N
I do not have any objections against same sex marriage	24.18%	25.27%	20.88%	19.78%	9.89%	91

Table 3: I do not have any objections against same sex marriage

The large group of people who neither agree nor disagree probably reflects the contested and difficult nature of these questions for Christians in the UK as a whole. What members and supporters of Green Christian are, is a theologically

[39] Interestingly, when only looking at those who (strongly) agree with the statement that the bible is the infallible world of God, 32.61% (N=47) of these people have no objections against same sex marriage. However, of those who opposed same sex marriage only 1 person did not agree with the infallibility of the bible. As such viewing the bible as the infallible word of God doesn't necessarily translate into supporting other theologically conservative views as well. Another reason might be that the meaning of 'infallible' is interpreted differently by respondents. However, with both questions there is also a substantial group that neither agrees nor disagrees.

diverse group of people who are part of the established churches and who are loyal churchgoers.

6.4.3: Politics, age and gender

The members and supporters of Green Christian sharply differ from the wider society in terms of their political preference. No less than 48.39% (N=93) is supportive of the Green Party with also substantial support for Labour (23.66) and the Liberal Democrats (17.20) while both the Conservative Party and UKIP have almost no support (combined 5.38%).

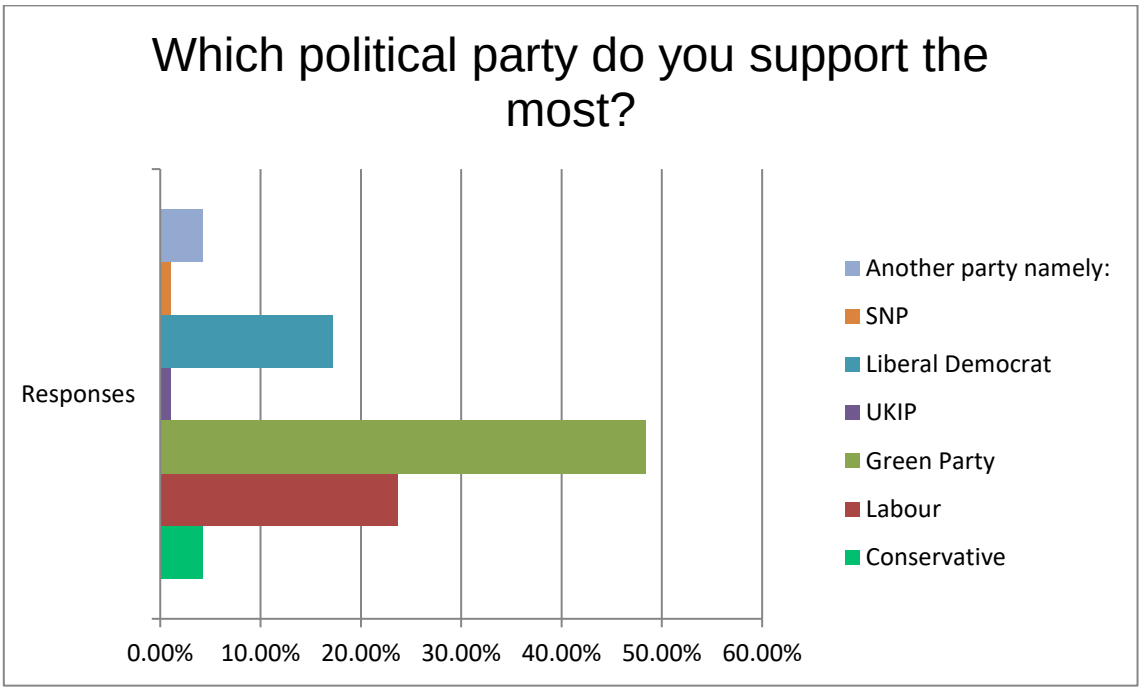

Figure 3: Which political party do you support the most?

These findings are very different from recent election results and seem to confirm that environmental issues are increasingly becoming polarised along ideological lines as has been argued in the first literature chapter. The finding also raises the question whether members and supporters of Green Christian are faith motivated or whether ideological motivation also plays an important role. The survey also found that there are more female than male supporters and members of Green Christian. The gap is roughly 10% (45.16% male; 54.84% female) and might seem quite odd but there is a good explanation for this gap. Within sociology and psychology, it is well-known that females have a higher religiousness, more often identify with a religion and have higher church attendance compared with males. This 'religion gender gap' is universal and has been widely observed across the

world[40] (Winseman 2002; Sullins 2006; Francis & Penny 2014; Pew Research Center 2016). Scholars are still debating the causes of this gender difference and there have been strong disagreements between scholars who have proposed more biologically orientated answers and scholars who have proposed more socially oriented answers. (see Miller & Hoffman 1995; Miller & Stark 2002; Stark 2002; Roth & Kroll 2007; Voas et al 2013; Collett & Lizardo 2009; Freese & Montgomery 2007; Devine 2013; Bradshaw & Ellison 2009). For this thesis it is important to emphasise that this gender gap is well-known phenomenon and most likely not related to some kind of bias in the collected data but instead linked to higher religiosity among females. It could also be possible that females are more environmentally concerned and as such are more likely to join Green Christian. Research has found small differences between male and female in terms of environmental concern, attitudes and pro-environmental behaviour whereby females are more concerned and more willing to act environmentally friendly (see McCright & Xiao 2014; Torgler & García-Valiñas 2007; Franzen & Vogl 2013; Hunter et al 2004; Sundström & McCright 2014).The survey also shows that the members and supporters of Green Christian are mostly of older age. Only 6.46% (N=93) of all the members and supporters is aged 35 or under while those aged 56 years or older make up 66.67% of the total number of members and supporters. Those aged 66-75 make up 29.03% of all the members and supporters.

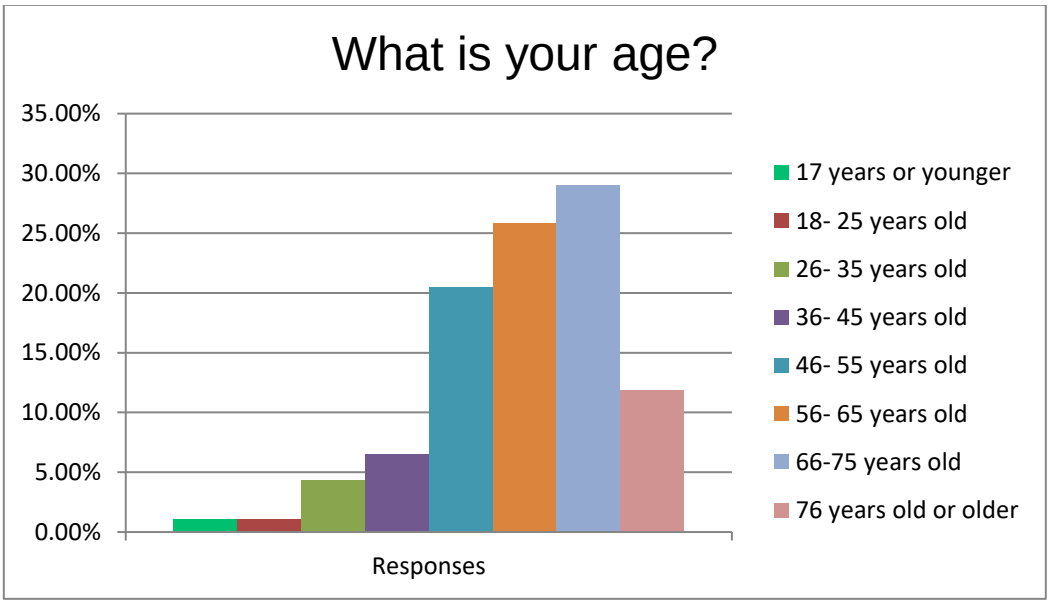

Figure 4: What is your age?

The lack of younger members and supporters is well-known to the Green Christian leadership and it is also very visible during meeting and the leadership has been

[40] Exception to this rule seem to be Orthodox Jews and Muslims according to Sullins (2006) while another study has argued that this gender difference is something specifically related to Christianity (Loewenthal et al 2002)

seeking to attract younger people but as the survey shows the lack of younger members and supporters is still formidable challenge for Green Christian. This struggle to attract younger people and the effect of the decline of institutionalised Christianity upon environmentally concerned Christians will be discussed more in-depth later in this chapter. Although not asked in the survey but something that was very clear during the events that were attended is that almost all members and supporters of Green Christian are white. Minority groups are virtually absent within Green Christian. So, most members and supporters are overwhelmingly older and left wing and slightly more often female than male.

6.4.4: Eco-theology

In terms of eco-theology beliefs, most supporters and members of Green Christian reject the idea that humans rule over the rest of nature. 61.54% oppose this idea while 17.58% agree with the idea and 20.88% (N=91) neither agree nor disagree.

	Yes, I completely agree	Yes, I agree	Neither agree nor disagree	No, I disagree	No, I strongly disagree	N
Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature	5.49%	12.09%	20.88%	30.77%	30.77%	91

Table 4: Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature

Interestingly, when only focusing on those who had given ‘theologically conservative’ answers (anti-same sex marriage and pro-infallibility) the percentage of those who support human rule over nature rises to 33.33% among those who oppose same sex marriage and rises to 29.79% among those who view the bible as infallible. But also, among those holding ‘theological conservative’ ideas support for rule over nature is still a minority opinion. The reason why these theologically conservative people support rule of nature more often is probably related to stewardship. As showed in the previous chapter, members of the Evangelical and charismatic Anglican church also support the idea that humans are placed above nature but they also emphasise their subordination to God who is placed above everything else. As such the rule of nature is not interpreted as permission to abuse nature but rather as a demand to care and protect nature under God’ command. It is likely that in the survey people with conservative theological views frequently supported the idea of human rule of nature but see this through a similar ‘theocentric’ stewardship lens as in the focus groups. When asked about the statement ‘When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences’ everybody agreed apart from 9.78% (N=92) who neither agreed nor disagreed. Nobody disagreed with the statement. Almost everybody also agrees on the statement that God is present in nature 93.47% (N=92) and when

asked if they had experienced God when they were in nature 85.87% (N=92) agreed while 13.04% neither agreeing nor disagreeing and just 1.08% disagrees (that is 1 person).

	Yes, I completely agree	Yes, I agree	Neither agree nor disagree	No, I disagree	No, I strongly disagree	N
When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences	39.13%	51.09%	9.78%	0.00%	0.00%	92
God is present in nature	63.04%	30.43%	4.35%	2.17%	0.00%	92
I have experienced the presence of God when I have been in nature	50.00%	35.87%	13.04%	1.09%	0.00%	92

Table 5: three questions related to eco-theology

Members and supporters of Green Christian also almost unanimously agree with the statement 'My faith in an important motivator in addressing environmental issues'. 94.56% (N=92) agree with this statement while 5.43% neither agrees nor disagrees and nobody disagrees. So, most supporters and members their faith is important to them when they address environmental issues.

6.4.5: The environment in the context of the local church

Firstly, the survey asked how concerned about the environment the clergy in their own church were. 59.09% (N=88) indicated that clergy in their church were concerned or somewhat concerned about the environment while 11.36% said that clergy were neither concerned nor unconcerned and 10.23% said that their clergy were unconcerned or somewhat concerned. But a large group of 17.05% said that they didn't know how concerned their clergy were.

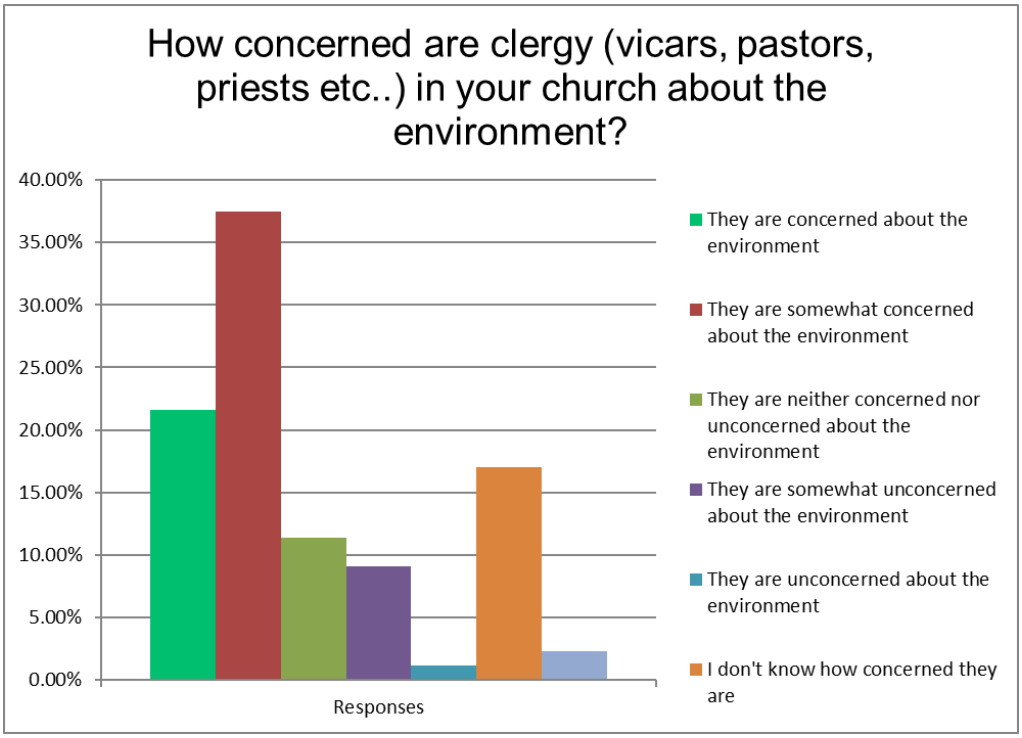

Figure 5: How concerned are clergy in your church about the environment?

A very large majority of 90.91% of all the members and supporters of Green Christian thinks that the environment should have a bigger or a much bigger role in church. Nobody thinks that there should be less attention to the environment in church.

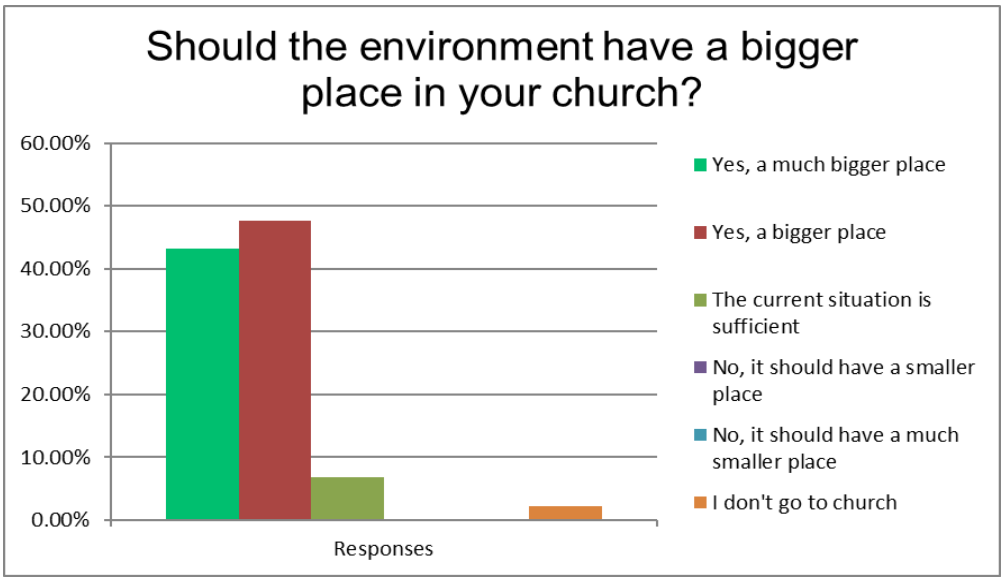

Figure 6: Should the environment have a bigger place in your church?

A majority of 51.14% (N=88) discusses environmental issues with fellow churchgoers while 42.05% does so but not very often. However, the responses that

supporters and members of Green Christian get are mostly negative. 64.77% says that fellow churchgoers either don't see it as an issue that is relevant for the church, deny the science or the severity of the issue or agree on the severity but don't undertake action. 28.44% had a more positive experience and says that fellow churchgoers agree and are willing to help addressing environmental issues.

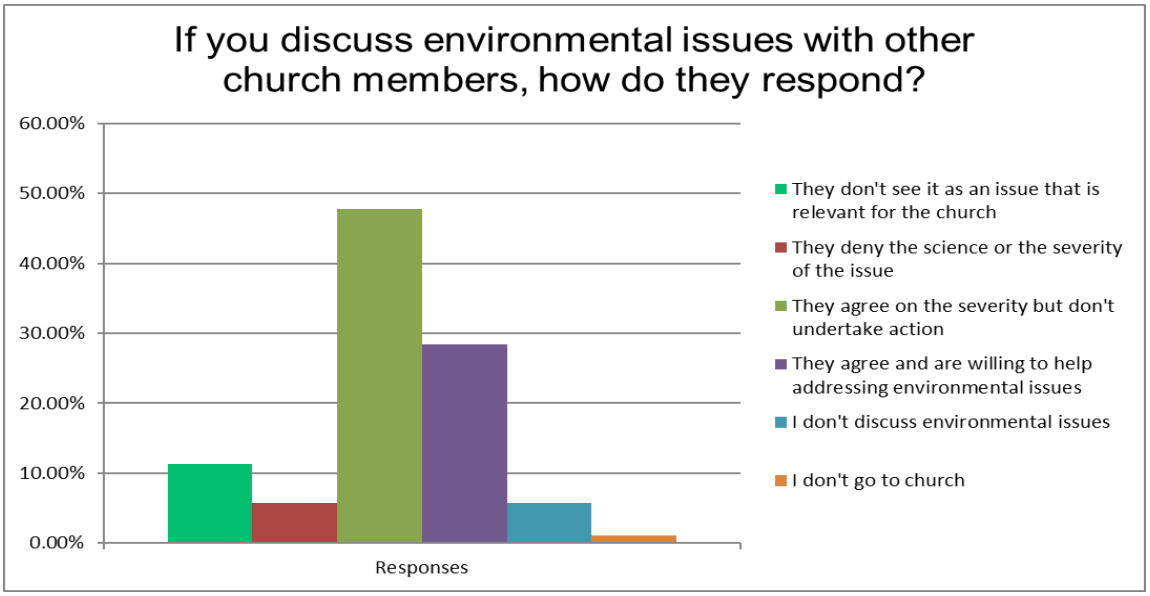

Figure 7: If you discuss environmental issues with other church members, how do they respond?

6.4.6: The church, environmental issues and the wider society.

Interestingly, all respondents (N=88) agree that Churches should take actively part in the political debates surrounding issues such as climate change. Nobody was opposed nor was anybody 'neither in favour nor opposed' to this idea. Unanimously they wanted churches get involved in political debates. A large majority of 79.55% (N=88) of the members and supporters of Green Christian is also involved in secular environmental groups while a minority of 10.23% does not want to get involved.

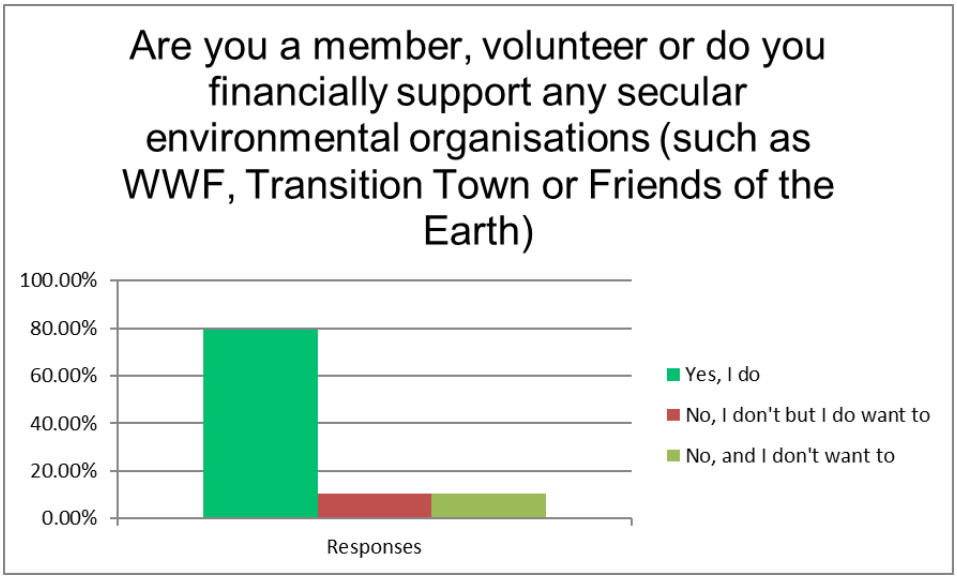

Figure 8: Are you member, volunteer or do you financially support any secular environmental organisations?

Similarly, 95.45% (n=88) wants faith-based organisations and secular organisations to collaborate on environmental issues. These high numbers suggest that many environmentally concerned Christians are involved in secular environmental groups and might support the forming of 'postsecular' partnerships and support churches in getting more involved with politics.

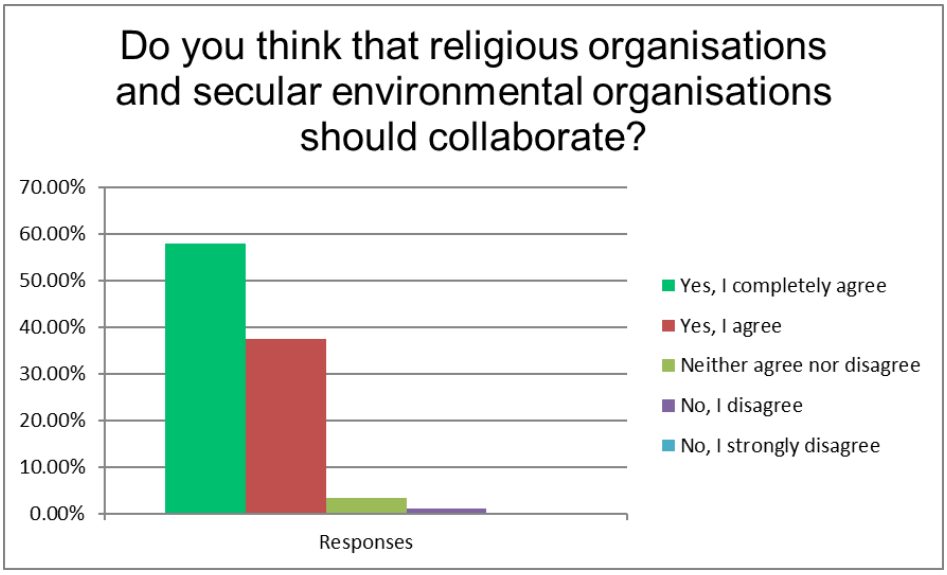

Figure 9: Do you think that religious organisations and secular organisations should collaborate?

6.4.7: Concluding Remarks

Summarising, it is clear that supports and members of Green Christian form an aged group of people who are very much left leaning but who also often believe in a personal God, attend church on a weekly basis and come from both theologically liberal and conservative backgrounds. In church they tend to be quite positive

about the environmental concerns of their clergy but feel that the rest of the church is often not very much interested in the environment. From the survey it is also clear that supporters and members of Green Christian favour an outward looking church that is involved in politics and collaborates with secular groups. As such it seems like that there are many possibilities for environmentally concerned Christians to collaborate outside their church but within their own church they might face quite a struggle to get their fellow churchgoers interested in the environment.

This chapter won't study Green Christian on its own. It is rather a study of the members and supporters of Green Christian and how they live their lives as environmentally concerned Christians. Sometimes Green Christian takes up a significant role in their lives but their life as an environmentally concerned Christian evolves around three important places. Firstly, there is their own church where they worship, volunteer, attend bible studies and have many friends. But their own church is also often a place where there is indifference and unfamiliarity towards the environment and where they struggle to make fellow believers interested in the environment. Secondly, there are the secular environmental organisations in which almost all environmentally concerned Christians are involved. In these secular organisations environmental concerned Christians work passionately together with many others from other non-Christian backgrounds who share the same concerns for the environment and with work together to protect the natural world. However, it is also the place where their faith seems to be forgotten and where faith motivations have little relevance for the rest of the organisation. The involvement with secular groups will also be extensively discussed in the postsecularity chapter. Thirdly, there is Green Christian itself as a place where environmentally concerned Christians learn about faith and the environment and where they find a supportive community of similar minded believers who share not only their concerns and commitments for the environment but also a group of people who share the same beliefs that spurs them into action against environmental problem.

6.5: Researching environmentally concerned Christians

The following part of this chapter will be using the empirical data that was gathered through interviews and participant observations with members and supporters of Green Christian. Using these findings, the upcoming sections of this chapter will focus on how environmentally concerned Christians got involved with environmental issues, the ways in which they relate their faith with the environment, the difficulties that they face and how Green Christian provides its members with a space for friendship, understanding and comfort. A list of interviewees can be found in appendix 7. The following sections will especially relate to the arguments as outlined in section 6.2.1.

6.5.1: The start

The following section will outline how environmentally concerned Christians started to become interested and concerned about the environment. For environmentally concerned Christians, the natural environment and the protection of it takes up a very important role within their lives. Both as believers and as citizens within the wider society the environment has a very prominent place. From an early age these environmentally concerned Christians have been interested, concerned and involvement in activities that seek to protect and promote care for the environment. Often their involvement started as a child admiring the beauty and complexity of the natural world and who was taken on trips to the countryside by his or her parents. These encounters with the natural world at a very young age often sparked a lifelong interest for the environment that still stands today. A retired Methodist minister explains how he:

'…went out on walks with my dad. He would point various things out in the countryside. And I remember, I think it was 1962. There was a national event …. and the idea was to promote interest in the environment and natural history and my dad took me along to an exhibition in our local library and one of the people organising the exhibition was a local natural history society and at that point I joined as one of their child members and you know, we got involved in various studies and projects locally. I think that will be where it all started'.

David

In a similar fashion an female member of Green Christian describes how she learned to love and care for plants and animals *'at my parent's knee'* (Catherine) while a Green Christian supporter and retired Anglican priest told how he grew up on a farm surrounded by nature and animals and how this made him very interested in the natural world:

I grew up on a farm and therefore was surrounded by the world of nature from a very young age and also was very interested in plants and of course in the animals that we had on the farm.

Robert

However, this seemingly innocent love for animals and plants was also soon turned into concern for the environment and an understanding that humans were abusing it. Many describe how around that same age they started to see the destruction that humans were causing to the environment by their irresponsible lifestyle:

I think it was the first time as a youngster that I noticed a chimney spitting out harmful gasses into the air. Since then I have been deeply interested in the environment.

Jonathan

Another environmentally concerned Christian tells about how at a very young age he was given a book '*which was all about pollution and how resources like oils and some metals might be running out quite soon'* (Tom) while a female supporter of Green Christian describes how in the beginning *'it was more an interest in and awareness of wildlife and natural life and things'* but that this interest was gradually evolved and led her to a realisation of *'the impact that people are having on the environment sort of evolved following that'* (Anna). For many environmentally concerned Christians getting involved in environmentalism is natural progression onwards from loving animals and admiring the natural world. One active female member of Green Christian explained how for her after growing up with a love for the environment and spending much of her youth outdoors playing in *'the woods at the back of the garden'* getting involved in conservation work and Green Christian felt as *'just a natural progression from that'* (Hannah). Another female supporter of Green Christians describes how she was brought up in the suburbs of South London but how she *'always wanted to be in the countryside'* and how when she was around 11 years old she used to *'cycle out of the city and try to be in the countryside'* but also how she related her love for the countryside to her faith '*through the songs and the hymns that we would sing in which we're praising God for his creation for the seas and the plants'*. For her this fusion of love for the countryside and admiration of the beauty of God' creation then:

'….. crystallised in my late teenage years when I realised that you could get involved with environmental groups and helping with conservation'.

(Jenny)

So, for many environmentally concerned Christians growing up in an environment where they could admire the beauty of the natural world, and they were actively encouraged to do so did not only cause them to have happy childhood memories but these encounters with the natural world also spurred them into involvement with conservation efforts and environmental action. During their childhood but also during their time at school and university they learned not only about the beauty and complexity of nature but they also learned about the threats that irresponsible human behaviour posed to it. Learning about the physical processes behind environmental problems made them very much aware of issues like climate change, food waste or air pollution and willing to get involved into efforts to address these problems. Because despite their interest and passion for the beauty of the

natural world these environmentally concerned Christians are first and foremost deeply concerned about the current state of the planet. They often depict a very dark picture of the current situation and argue that that today's society and political establishment are failing to care properly for the environment and instead prefer to put their personal interests first. This sense that society is failing to care about the environment lives very strong among some of the environmentally concerned Christians. But this sense of failure doesn't act as a motivation to do something but rather they feel often hopeless and see doom and disaster. For example, a female supporter of Green Christian argued:

I'm horribly concerned. I think you know we are heading for real planetary disaster in many ways and I think that the trouble is that we don't have the political will to do anything drastically enough. So, I'm very greatly concerned but I don't see how at the moment we are going to deal with these problems because people are going to change their way of life so dramatically in order to actually deal with the things that are going wrong. I do feel a bit hopeless at this moment.

(Elisabeth)

Asked about her concern for the planet another female simply stated:

Very concerned. I mean, I think it looks very doomed at present. I think we need a few miracles to get us out of it.

(Bethany)

Another female member of Green Christian told how *'the global situation is getting out of hand'* and that '*this can only get worse'* (Helen). In these statements a lot of pessimism is visible and the people in these quotes really feel that the current situation is dangerous for everyone, but they also feel unable to reverse this situation. Although these examples are quite extreme in their depiction of hopelessness and use a language that depicts a situation in which only 'miracles' can bring a better outcome other environmentally concerned Christians also firmly agree that the situation is very critical, and that drastic action is needed but that little action is being undertaken. Often the blame for this is put on politicians or more generally on the selfish nature of people. Although not using the same strong language of the participants above they too are very concerned about the lack of concern or engagement of the wider public. For example an active but relative new female member of Green Christian says:

My current concerns are that in this country, as a developed and rich country, we are very arrogant on all the resources and from the way that we buy our food…. I'm not talking about me but I'm talking about the society in general, we don't seem to worry about air miles or transportation or food and we don't seem to have any concern about the quality of life of people who produce our very cheap food.

Catherine

As the quote above shows this female is very concerned about lack of any concern for consequences of the choices that people make. This really concerns and worries her and encourages her to make her own lifestyle more sustainable but others around her are very reluctant to do so. Another male shares her concerns and is deeply concerned about with how things are going because *'we are not going to leave such a nice world for future generations and that's very selfish of us'* (Jonathan). Many environmentally concerned Christians are very much concerned about the environment and the perceived lack of any kind of response or action. But at the same they seem to have no clear solution for this problem. Some even said as quoted on the previous page how they feel *'feel a bit hopeless'* and how *'we need a few miracles to get us out of it'* (Elisabeth). She also described how her husband' work in the Philippines had made her very much aware of the problems that climate change is causing there and how *'one typhoon after the other are hitting the Philippines and causing incredible damage and it just never seems to stop'* but that such disasters never seem to occur in the UK and as such people in the UK *'don't realise how drastic things are in some other parts of the world'*. But she also stated that unfortunately *'I don't have a solution'* (Elisabeth). So, even though environmentally concerned Christian are deeply concerned about the state of the planet and disappointed about inaction they don't have a ready solution to solve this problem. However, this struggle to turn knowledge and willingness to address environmental problems into actual action is as already mentioned in the introduction of this thesis very difficult. Finding ways to break out of the circle of inactivity towards environmental problems has occupied a large number of academics. However, there was one person who did have a kind of solution. Similarly, to the other people this retired supporter of Green Christian said:

'I'm very concerned. I don't believe that either politicians or ordinary people are taking the matter of climate change and resource depletion at all seriously and I'm far from convinced that the steps that have been agreed to at cop21 last year will in fact be taken or that they are in fact enough to avert quite a catastrophic in the earth' environment'.

(Tom)

So, also for this man the major concern is that both people and politicians are seemingly unconcerned about environmental problems and that there is no rush to step up the efforts despite the *'potentially catastrophic'* nature of the problem. This makes him deeply concerned for the future but he also says that:

…even though I'm pessimistic I'm not going to give up. I will just carry on doing the best I can. Trying to inspire the people rather….. I don't think it helps to tell people that things are terrible and that's all their fault. I think you actually have to provide better alternatives'.

(Tom)

Although this man is disappointed about the inaction of many people he doesn't want stay hopeless and only complain about others. He wants to show alternatives to people and inspire them. The way for him to inspire people and provide them with more positive alternatives was through his involvement in a large community garden project because according to him this makes people interested in growing their own food and through this engagement *'they start to ask questions'* (Tom) about the origin of the food, why it's in the supermarket and why it is so cheap. For him the community garden provides him with an opportunity to engage with people and make them think about where their food comes from what consequences that has. This in turn will hopefully make people more aware of the consequences of their choices. *'It does help people to begin a journey'* (Tom) as this man puts it. So, the community garden provided an opportunity to engage with others and try to get them to realise some of the consequences of their eating habits. As such, this man is able to bring environmental issues closer to people and start to bring awareness about the issues that need to be addressed.

Although, the pessimistic views from the earlier quotes don't control environmentally concerned Christians, many also see positives developments among their faith leaders and see that their own (grand) children are very well aware of environmental problems but there is among many environmentally concerned Christians also a deep concern about the lack of interest and willingness within society to address environmental problems and their inability to challenge it. This was particularly clear in the aftermath of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States. These developments were met with disbelieve by members and supporters of Green Christian and many feared what the future would bring, especially in relation to the environment. *'I expect most GC members and supporters felt the same sense of shock that I did on the morning of Friday June 24th'* was written in a piece on the Green Christian website[41]. Many members and supporters see the EU in a positive light and as a

[41] See http://www.greenchristian.org.uk/learning-from-the-eu-referendum-2/

protector of environmental legislation that the ruling Conservative party wants to get rid of. In response to Brexit referendum outcome Green Christian also organised a workshop during which it was commented that *'we are in an 'alien land' now'* and in the 2017 edition of the Green Christian publication 'Storm of Hope' it was written that:

The outcomes of the UK referendum on the EU and the US Presidential election came as a surprise and shock to many. We may feel that we no longer recognise our own country, that we no longer understand the people around us, that we have opposing concerns and objectives.

Storm of Hope (2017)[42]

This idea of living in an alien land was also the theme of a retreat back in 2011 and it reflects how Green Christian members and supporters feel like they are the lonely voice to which nobody seems to listen. However, members and supporters of Green Christian are also told that they are disciples of Jesus Christ and that their Christian faith requires them to stand up against the abuse of the environment. Standing up for the environment in 'an alien land' is what God wants them to do and of course there will be struggles and disappointments but it is something that their faith demands. The earlier mentioned edition of Storm of Hope sees similarities between the biblical prophets and how their divine messages were rejected and how the message of Green Christian and the wider green movement is rejected by society in the 21st century. But for the writer of the article this does not show that members and supporters of Green Christian are just ignored. Because as with the biblical prophets, the message that environmentally concerned Christians have is urgent and a biblical command. *'Human laws and political will may fail in caring for the planet, but God's Word will never fail'* as the 2017 edition of Storm of Hope states. So, for Green Christian protecting the environment is not merely done to protect animals, address climate change or to have clean air for future generations but it also done because it's a divine command. For Green Christian, protecting the environment is simply what God wants us to do.

6.5.2: Theology

The following section will discuss the eco-theology of Green Christian as an organisation and that of the individual environmentally concerned Christians. The main argument of this section will be that the environment is central to the faith of environmentally concerned Christians and for them environmental issues are much more than just another scientific or political issue.

[42] All publications of Storm of Hope can be found at: http://www.greenchristian.org.uk/resources/storm-of-hope/

For many environmentally concerned Christians faith, environmental issues, science and politics are deeply entwined and an eco-theology without political consequences or actions is unthinkable for many. For many environmentally concerned Christians their eco-theology starts with stewardship and the idea that they have to caring for the 'neighbours' who are being affected by environmental issues. *'We're partners with God and looking after the planet'* (William) as one active member of Green Christian told. Similar to some the focus groups, many environmentally concerned Christians argue that God has commanded them to take care of his creation and that Christians are supposed to be stewards who protect the creation from harm and abuse but also that environmental problems like climate change and air pollution demonstrate that Christians are failing to be the stewards that God wants them to be. This command to be stewards but failing to be good stewards is very frequently used by environmentally concerned Christians from all sorts of denominational backgrounds:

This isn't our world, this is God's world and that I want to take care of it as best I can. We can't continue to live the way that we are living. We are living like we have three planets instead of one and that kind of thing. It's unrealistic for the human race to go on living and exploiting our resources the way we have been doing. If we care about other people in the end we have to find a way of living within what the planet can offer us.

(Elisabeth)

……*you've been given this lovely earth to live on so we should be looking after it for future generations and not trashing and place and not using resources as quickly as we can. That's very selfish of us and I wish more people would realise this. We are bringing kids into this world, that's part of what we are here for, to produce future generations, but we're not going to leave them a decent world to live in.*

(Jonathan)

Being a good steward is respecting that and not trashing it….. Keeping it in a good state like you should do with your home. Not letting it decay or neglect or letting it suffer through bad practice in any way. Pollution for example. Trying to minimise the footprint and trying to work with the creation and not against it.

(Jenny)

These quotes are very similar to the statements from the focus groups and they do in fact they approach environmental problems from the same angle. Namely, as a

failure to live as a good steward and acknowledging the consequences that this failure has on the state of the planet. Also seeking justice and stopping poverty as biblical mandates were mentioned as reasons why people were involved in environmental issues:

A world without poverty is an important mandate for us Christians….. our environmental actions actually harm people, actually push people into radical poverty.

Thomas

Some also extended the notion of 'neighbour' the rest of creation. *'Loving your neighbour as yourself extends to me beyond just neighbour. It embraces for me everything'* (Catherine) as a member of Green Christian described. But from the quotes above there don't seem to be major differences between 'normal' churchgoers in Exeter and the supposedly more committed and dedicated environmentally concerned Christians. However, as the rest this section will make clear there are big differences between the eco-theology of environmentally concerned Christians and the participants of the focus groups in terms of how their eco-theology is embedded into their lives, how it is lived out and is linked up with science and politics. Whereas within the focus groups people often seemed to be stuck with individual behaviour, these environmentally concerned Christians go beyond that and construct an eco-theology that is deeply political and that takes up a central role within their faith.

6.5.3: Spiritual problem

This section will continue to explore the links between faith and addressing environmental problems. For environmentally concerned Christians the deep-seated desire for economic growth and material wealth in today' society forms the cause of environmental problems. However, they also see this desire for wealth and fortune as being closely linked to spirituality. The spirituality of people needs to change in order to become less fixated on wealth and the material side of life. For example, an active member of Green Christian and retired Methodist minister said:

'only by shifting peoples' spirituality away from this desire to acquire more and more stuff will their hearts and minds be open to the need to take the environment, that we all share, more seriously'.

(Harry)

This idea is not focused on 'spirituality' as some kind of postmodern/post Christian faith but it is specifically about Christian spirituality and how the Christian faith can help people to realise how buying and consuming more and more 'stuff' is very

individualistic and won't do them any good and will badly hurt the environment. A retired but active male member of Green Christian commented that:

People are much more individualistic, they want things their way..... The 'here and me culture' is basically selfish whereas Christianity talks about loving God and loving your neighbours, part of the neighbour is the environment

(William)

However, this doesn't mean that the current way of being a Christian and going to church will save the planet. Christians are behaving badly too and showing little concern for the environment. But according to environmentally concerned Christians, within the bible and the many teachings and traditions of Christianity there are many verses, teachings and commandments that emphasise the care and protection of the environment. Unfortunately, this 'green aspect' of the Christian faith is not well-known for many Christians. For many Christians being a Christian has little obvious links with being concerned about the planet or trying to address environmental problems. The already earlier mentioned retired Methodist minister said:

'some people in the pews…… tend to say, well I'm a Christian but I'm not a 'Green'. But I have to say I don't think that's a position you can uphold with integrity. I think Christians basically ought to be green'.

(Harry)

Other environmentally concerned Christians had similar complaints (especially those who were clergy) and they are argued that the current Christian view is often very narrow and tends to ignore the parts that go beyond the personal faith. For example a retired Anglican priest argued:

I think that there's been a too narrow interpretation of theological understanding, focusing too much, no not too much but focusing solely on an understanding of God of Christ, of the Holy Spirit of the church as church but not enough thinking about the world that God has created. And how all the first things that I talked about how that relates to the world as it is and what's happening in it.

(Robert)

So, being a Christian is much more than 'believing in Jesus', praying and attending bible studies. As such it is very clear for many environmentally concerned Christians that much change is needed among churches and Christians themselves in the ways that they incorporate the environment into their faith. For all environmentally concerned Christians the environment is paramount to their

Christian faith. However, it goes even further than that. Being a Christian runs much deeper and affects all aspects of life and encompasses all of creation and not just the spiritual bits. Being a Christian and living as a Christian also involves addressing all the wrong doings in the economy, politics, and every other aspect of life. Being Christian is being political. The idea that being a Christian is something so wide reaching and with so many deeply political implications is a conviction that is widely shared among environmentally concerned Christians. *'Faith is not something in a little box on its own. It's all integral to who I am and how I behave'* (Robert) as a retired priest and supporter of Green Christian said. A male who wasn't a member of Green Christian but 'just' received the newsletter said that he had no other choice than to address environmental problems because it causes great injustice around the world while fighting for justice is 'just omnipresent in the bible' (Thomas). As such his faith told him to address the injustice of environmental problems. For many environmentally concerned Christians environmental problems, racism and issues of economic inequality are just as important to being a Christian as is reading the bible or praying are. Being a Christian involves your whole life as a female member of Green Christian who became interested in the environment through her contact with the Green Christian chaplain explains:

It is not enough for Christians to make a decision to 'ask Jesus into their heart' and then to leave their feelings, thoughts, prejudices and beliefs unchallenged. They need to shed the light of the Spirit over every aspect of life, not just the 'spiritual' bits and have them converted to the way of the kingdom of God as revealed by Jesus. He called upon us to look at issues of peace and justice; war, gender, attitudes to poverty, wealth, trade, and creation/the environment

(Helen)

This process of making your whole life follow Jesus, not just your spiritual life was described by some as 'Continuing Conversion'. Former Baptist minister and the current chaplain of Green Christian strongly emphasised the idea that being a Christian has far reaching consequences for your whole life not just your spiritual life or your church life and how becoming a disciple of Jesus is something much wider and radical that many believers assume. For him the more radical meaning of discipleship had first started in the context of urban ministry while working as a Baptist minister at an inner city church in Birmingham. There he started to realise he needed to discover his neighbourhood and its people, who they are, how they are and what their perceived needs are. Not his needs or those of the church. For him this was about finding out what the needs of the people in his local area were and then helping them as a disciple of Jesus should do. This then led him into 'peace and justice' activism and especially action against nuclear weapons and war in general. However, while working on such issues he started to learn about the hole in the ozone layer and other environmental problems and he started to

realise that humans were not only literally destroying the earth with bombs but also that *'we weren't not looking after people or the planet*' (Andrew) as he put it.

if God's creation, God's order is being disrupted then a disciple needs to understand what her/his part is in that'

(Andrew)

So, he and also the rest of his congregation started to see the severity of the issue and that their own way of living was the cause of these environmental problems and their actions were harming creation. Therefore, as disciples of Jesus they needed to start taking action. According to the chaplain of Green Christian *'our responsibility as disciples of Jesus is to change our ways of living'* (Andrew).

6.6: Engaging the Christians

The following sections will discuss how environmentally concerned Christians seek to engage their fellow believers because convincing fellow Christians of the need of such a radical redefinition of discipleship and the urgency of making the environment central to the Christian faith will require a substantial amount of theological explaining and engagement with the wider church by environmentally concerned Christians. This engagement takes place in three ways.

1) Firstly, by re-interpreting well-known bible verses such as John 3.16 and the 'Great Commission' to emphasise the importance of the environment or to give alternative interpretations of well-known bible verses in order to pursue people to give the environment a more central role in their Christian faith.
2) Secondly, by emphasising that as a Christian caring for the environment is not something on the side or which others can do but that caring for God's creation is 'a Way of Life'
3) Thirdly, by emphasising the need for action by referencing to scientific studies, reports by NGO's and statements from faith leaders like Pope Francis or Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby and pointing out the deep political implications that such reports and statements have.

6.6.1: Offering green alternatives

Environmentally concerned Christians are seeking to engage fellow Christians by showing them the importance of the environment in bible verses or by offering alternative interpretations of well-known bible stories or verses. It was through such attempts that one active male member of Green Christian became interested in the environment and decided to join Green Christian. He had been working in the printing industry and as part of that job he was responsible for publication of the Green Christian Magazine. Part of this responsibility was proof reading this magazine and while reading the articles 'It just caught my interest'. These articles

shed *'new light on my experience as a Christian'* as he put it and he began to realise that he had a *'quite narrow minded view of Christians living on this planet'* (William). For him this realisation came especially through the interpretation that Green Christian follows regarding John 3 verse 16. It is one of the most well-known verses from the New Testament and is often seen as capturing the essence of the whole bible:

'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life'.

However, Green Christian urges people to go back to the original Greek in which the gospel was first written. In the Greek version the word 'world' is replaced by the word 'cosmos' (κόσμον) and what this implies according to Green Christian is that God not just loved people but he loved His entire creation and he send His Son not just for people but for the entire creation. Realising the centrality of creation in this well-known bible verse this male member of Green Christian felt that he had no other option than to give creation/ the environment a much more prominent role in his Christian faith. As such he now feels that he has a *'deeper and more accurate understanding of my relationship with the planet and therefore stewardship takes on a better meaning'* (William). The moment of learning this new interpretation of John 3.16 was very important and it really changed his life around. *'My eyes were opened'* as he states and after this 'conversion' he also put his new creation centred belief into practice by walking instead of going in the car, eating local food and going on local holidays. If he hadn't encountered Green Christian he would have been *'a bit more self-indulgent'* (William) as he put it himself. So, learning this alternative theological interpretation really spurred him into environmental issues and this is exactly what Green Christian wants to achieve by engaging with fellow Christians. Although, this male member of Green Christian was the only person that directly 'converted' through this greening of bible verses (more about conversion later on in this chapter), many Christian members and supporters do emphasise 'green' readings or interpretations of well-known bible verses[43]. Another example is the 'Great Commission'. This command by Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew in chapter 26 is well-known and is seen by many Christians as a command to read the gospel and convert people to Christianity all around the world. It reads:

[43] Recently, there has even been a 'Green Bible' published. This bible has all verses that deal with the environment printed in green. https://www.nrsv.net/harper/the-green-bible/ . Although some have criticised this 'Green Bible' attempt (see Horrell 2010a; Frohlich 2013)

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

These bible verses have seemingly very little to do with the environment. But within Green Christian many members and supporters often refer to the lesser known version of the Great Commission that can be found in the Gospel of Mark in chapter 15. This version reads:

'He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation'

This version of the great commission explicitly mentions all of creation. This doesn't mean that plants or animals have to be converted as well. But rather, Green Christian emphasises that the verse shows that creation is not some kind of passive decor on which the human story unfolds but something that is loved and treasured by God Himself and also part of God's salvation. However, at the moment creation is groaning (Romans 8) and suffering. So, according to Green Christian

So long as God's created order is spoiled and abused, our own salvation is incomplete. God has blessed us with gifts of understanding so that we can see the harm we are doing and the healing work we need to do – and also the healing work that needs to be done in us. In a warming world the Good News is cool! It is good news not just for humanity but for the entire universe.

(Storm of Hope 2015)

With this interpretation of the great commission Green Christian seeks to emphasise the importance of the environment and that caring for creation is not some far away political or scientific issue but rather an issue that is directly related to the core mission of Christianity. Caring for creation is part of the Great Commission. As such Christians need to address the things that are hurting creation, but a Christian should also address the underlying causes for these problems, namely greed and the desire to consume and possess more and more. For Green Christian, being a Christian should not only be good news for the individual believer but should also be good news for the whole of creation. These alternative/green interpretations of bible verses are often used by members and supporters of Green Christian during talks or discussions and often appear in Green Christian Magazine or the Storm of Hope publication. Whether they have any specific effect such as with the John 3.16 example is not clear. But the goal of these green alternative explanations is to show other Christians that the environment/creation do feature very prominently in the bible and cannot be

ignored or put aside and left to politicians or ‘experts’. Rather the environment and the harm that humans are causing to it is a central issue for the Christian faith that no believer can ignore.

6.6.2: Way of Life

The second way is that Green Christian is actively trying to construct caring for the environment as a ‘Way of Life’. Caring for God’s creation is much more than some individual actions aimed towards reducing food waste or using public transport more often. What the Way of Life approach tries to do is frame caring for the environment as something that encompasses all the aspects of life and it also seeks to provide a supportive community for all committed environmentally concerned Christians. Green Christian has sought to model their way of life after the ways of lives that religious orders like the Franciscans and the Benedictines follow. But the way of life that Green Christian is seeking to create is *‘exclusively focused on care for God’s creation’* (Adam) as the leader of the project told. With the Way of Life Green Christians want to give its members *‘the support of a shared discipline of prayer and environmental action’* as is argued in the Storm of Hope edition of 2015. People are invited by Green Christian to become *‘companions’ and follow this Green Christian ‘way of life’*. The reason why Green Christian decided to come up with way of life is according to the way of life leaflet because:

The time in which we are now living requires much prayer and mutual support in living simply on the earth, tackling climate change, challenging Government / local authority / business policies and practices, participating in campaigns, influencing our churches etc.

The Way of Life Community leaflet (2017)

In short, with the way of life Green Christian wants to *‘nurture radical Christian ecological discipleship’*. Green Christian distinguishes four parts within this way of life and together they give environmentally concerned Christians the tool to fully live out faith based environmental concern. These parts are:

1) Daily Prayer and Devotions
2) Living Gently on the Earth
3) Public Witness
4) Encouragement

Firstly, with daily prayer and devotion Green Christian means praising God and thanking Him for his beautiful creation and everything that the environment provides to humans. But also praying to God that He will change the hearts of people so that they will look at their consumer choices and will step away from their

desire to consume more and more. It also includes praying for forgiveness for people who disregard the environment or abuse it. The prayers that are used by Green Christian itself and its members and supporters are often highly political and also surprisingly full of science. Green Christian also publishes a prayer guide to help people to pray for the environment. Living gently on the earth focuses on the more practical and daily aspects like reducing car usage, going on holidays locally and 'going fossil free'. Almost all people that I spoke with during Green Christian events or during interviews said that they for example had stopped driving a car, stopped going on foreign holidays or were vegetarians or vegans. For them being an environmentally concerned Christian meant making such drastic lifestyle changes. This practical and personal engagement with the environment is very important for members and they see it as way to be a 'living example' for other Christians (and non-Christians as well)

My family lives a completely car free life. We've done always it and I recommend it to anybody. It is better to see a good sermon than to hear a good sermon and so if you're using a bike, walk or use public transport is actually a better way to give the message than to give long talks about it. People see you growing your own food. We grow raspberries in our front garden and all the kids on their way to school stop and look at it in June and July. They look at our raspberries in amazement. People stopping and asking why I'm doing it.

(Phil)

As such, by living gently on the earth members and supporters of Green Christians want to be living examples that might inspire others to do the same. The part of public witness is about campaigning, challenging norms towards the environment in society, protesting and participating in debates about the environment. But public witness is also about taking part in environmental groups or conservation efforts, both Christian and non-Christian and working together with others to protect the environment. Many environmentally concerned Christians are very political and are involved in campaigning, nature conservation and demonstrating (some also do non-violent direct action) but they are also do things like education or open days in their garden and some are also active members of political parties. Lastly, there is encouragement. Being an environmentally concerned is not always easy and sometimes even very difficult, as will be further explained in later in this chapter. But through the way of life Green Christian seeks to create a supportive community that can help, listen, support and advice people when things seem very difficult. This is an important aspect of the Green Christian way of life as many members and supporters feel rather lonely and disheartened in their own church. So, with the way of life Green Christian seeks to combine theological aspects of caring for God's creation with the practical aspects of making your own life sustainable and

the political actions required to change the wider society. Together they form the way of life for an environmentally concerned Christian.

From the previous sections of this chapter it is clear that Green Christian and its supporters and members want to be involved in much more than just theological debates. For environmentally concerned Christians and also for Green Christian as an organisation being interested and concerned about God's creation inherently brings them into politically contested waters and it will also bring them into fiercely contested scientific debates. But members and supporters of Green Christian don't shy away from these contested things and see being involved in these controversial things as being just as important as outlining a theology of creation care. For them theology cannot be some kind of sacred activity that is not connected to political action and seeking change in society. This will also be very clearly in the third and final point. Environmentally concerned Christians always link their theology with science and politics.

6.6.3: Combining theology with science and politics

The third way is a combination of theology, science and politics. As already shown in the first literature chapter, for eco-theology to have any positive effects on its followers, believers must understand the underlying causes of climate change or air pollution or whatever environmental problem and accept that humans are responsible. If they don't accept the science that blames humans for environmental problems, then they can develop a highly sophisticated eco-theology, but it will have little effect as humans are apparently are not to blame and therefore nothing that humans do has to be changed. As such many environmentally concerned Christians use a mix of science and theology to persuade their fellow believers to act. Science and faith seem to go hand in hand very well and any kind of clash seems absent within Green Christian. For many environmentally concerned Christians their theological explorations of creation care start with science and an acknowledgement that humans are abusing the environment. Both the earlier sections on their concerns for the planet and the first part of the theology section already show that environmentally concerned Christians acknowledge the negative impact of human behaviour on the environment. Often science or books or reports by activists and NGO's inform their theology. It's not science or theology but rather the two are combined. According to a retired Methodist minister:

It's more a combination of sort of climate science plus theological reflection about climate science. I remember reading 'The end of Nature' by Bill McKibben and things like that start to change the ways in which you think about things.

(Harry)

For this former Methodist minister, climate change and also popular science writings made him concerned about *'the future of the planet, the environment that we share with one and other and all living creatures'.* So, for him *'an awareness of the challenge to our environment posed by climate change and other factors, that's important'*. But environmental problems are for him also a concern in the sense that they show a need to make *'the Christian Gospel…. relevant to the people in the church so that we can say to people in the church, look the Christian church has something important to say about this issue which is more important than any other issue'* (Harry). Climate science spurred this retired Methodist minister on into rethinking his theology and it made him realise that churches must get involved in order to have any kind of influence and get their message across. The already earlier mentioned retired member of Green Christian, who became involved in environmental issues through Green Christian stated something similar:

In other words, it's not good enough just to be a Christian these days. You need to inform yourself and do best practice in what is going out there in the world at large, in terms of looking after the planet

(William)

So, for environmentally concerned Christians science informs theology about things that are going on and it brings forward urgent issues that Christians should be engaged with. Many environmentally concerned Christians are very well informed about all the latest research and on the online Green Christian discussion forum many people post links to news articles or research articles and discuss how these findings show the urgent need to push for change in churches and also the wider society. They use the latest scientific findings to convince their fellow Christians of the need to take action. For example, recently a study was published in *Science* about the emissions produced by various types of meat from farm all the way to the dinner table and these results were compared with results from various non-meat alternatives. The study found that meat was much worse in every comparison (see Poore & Nemecek 2018). This study was discussed among members and supporters of Green Christian on their online forum and this scientific study made them emphasise the need for a vegetarian or vegan diet and they also used the study as support for their urgent quest to make society more sustainable (and it made some also feel good about their own vegetarian/vegan diet). Another example is a recent study published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* that found that although humans constitute just a tiny portion of all the biomass on earth (0.01%) they are responsible for the destruction of 83% of all the wild mammals and that of all the mammals alive today 96% is livestock (see Bar-On et al 2018). Also, this study made members and supporters of Green Christian call for major changes in the ways how humans live on the planet. But this explicit use of science also extended to theology. In the recent prayer guide for July 2018

Green Christian explicitly mentioned research published in the journal *'Nature'* (see The IMBIE team et al 2018; Massom et al 2018) about ice loss on Antarctica as an reason to pray for the melting ice caps and rising sea levels. In another prayer guide from June 2016 the makers of the prayer guide mention a recently published study in the medical journal *'Thorax'* about the long-term effects of exposure to air pollution (see Hansell et al 2016) with the aim of letting people consider air pollution as a prayer point. For the makers of the prayer guide the research clearly showed the grave danger that the planet is currently in. Therefore, they pray that God will help society to confront its own unsustainable habits. But is also goes beyond specific scientific studies. For example, in the editorial of the Green Christian magazine the editor wrote how the rising levels of CO2 were making him sad and worried as an inhabitant of the earth but also as Christian:

On 9 May this year global CO2 briefly passed 400ppm. This was the first time it had done so in at least 800,000 years. It was a source of deep sadness for me and I felt it should be a cause for humanity to at least reflect, if not to mourn.

(Green Christian magazine Winter 2013/2014, 6)[44]

The examples above all show how science and theology are combined by supporters and members of Green Christian and how science and theology are combined to make a strong case for their desired radical societal change. But also, with these scientific studies they seek to build up a strong case to convince their fellow believers of the need to act.

Within the Green Christian prayer guide there are many prayer suggestions with references to academic studies. Often these references to studies are used to convey the urgency of issues like climate change and air pollution are combined with prayers in which God is asked to turn the hearts and minds of people around and prayers to help those who are seeking to 'green' their lives:

In these troubled days, dear Lord, we turn to thee. Grant to our nation a clear vision of her highest good and to our leaders a clear judgement as to how that good may be attained. May the temporary triumphs of parties and special interests, and the transient success of individuals, be surrendered to the common welfare

(GC prayer guide July 2016)[45]

[44] All editions of the Green Christian Magazine can be found at: http://www.greenchristian.org.uk/category/green-christian/

[45] All prayer guides can be found at: http://www.greenchristian.org.uk/faith-and-hope/prayer-guide/prayer-guide-archive/

While another prayer asks:

Dear Father, we pray, each one of us, for an honest appraisal of our own lifestyle, that we may admit, to ourselves and to you, all that we are contributing, directly or indirectly, to the pollution of your world. Help us to bear witness, by our example, to our resolve to amend our lives, so that others may take heart and act accordingly

(GC Prayer guide September 2014)

But theology was not only combined with science but also with politics. As already said before, for Green Christian and its members and supporters, theology and politics are inherently linked together. Often clear political positions are taken in prayers or theological discussions. For example, within Green Christian the idea that God is close to you or that the Holy Spirit lives within you are used as a metaphor to argue that travelling around the world or buying imported grapes from South America is not good and that instead Christians should be living locally.

Jesus said 'The reign of God is in your midst' or 'very close to you'. What do these words mean for a civilisation as reliant as ours on high-speed, global transport? .... How does your faith challenge current proposals for expanding London's airport capacity? Or high-speed rail projects such as HS2? Or measures to relieve local congestion?

(Storm of Hope 2014)

Also, many of the prayer suggestions in the Green Christian prayer guide are deeply political and clearly reveal the political preferences of those who wrote them. For example, the prayer guide of January 2017 expressed deep concern about former ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson becoming part of the Trump presidency. The prayer guide states that many view it with *'trepidation'* but it also states:

This world is, after all, God's handiwork and he is with us in all our efforts to protect it from human greed.

(GC prayer guide January 2017)

Other political prayer topics include prayers against fracking and prayers for the support of environment activists (including some Green Christian members) who had been arrested by police during acts of non-violent direct action and also prayers suggestions against genetically modified food and prayers against fossil fuel subsidies are included in prayer guides. For Green Christian and its supporters and members, theology, science and politics all have work together to make their

radical agenda become reality. Because for many environmentally concerned Christian there is a strong faith-based feeling that:

In our hearts we know Jesus would never authorise the destruction of Amazonian rainforest for soya plantations, the persistent pollution of northern wildernesses for tar oil sands, or the blasting of mountaintops for rare earth minerals. Nor would Jesus sanction the displacement of whole peoples because of conflicts over land and water; or the floods, droughts and hurricanes from our profligate burning of fossil fuels; or the current rate of species extinction.

(Storm of Hope 2018)

Within Green Christian this desire for radical change is always associated with left wing politics. It is fair to say that Green Christian meetings can sometimes feel a bit like a Green Party meeting. Many participants are members of the Green Party and during Green Christian meetings and also during other meetings organised by for examples dioceses or others, participants are often informed about upcoming Green Party events, sometimes even as part of the notifications and a few Green Party politicians are invited as speakers as well. For example, Green Party MEP Molly Scott Cato spoke during a Green Christian conference and during all the Green Christian meetings that I attended no participant ever identified themselves as voting the Conservative Party or being right wing in a more general sense and instead many extensively criticise the environmental policies (or the lack of them) of the current Conservative government. Another example is that back in 2015 during a meeting of the closely to Green Christian linked organisation Hope for the Future one participant mentioned that he had become a member of the Labour Party in order Jeremy Corbyn win the leadership elections. This announcement was met with laughter and applause and many agreed with this man' statement that Labour needed a strong left-wing leader. That environmentally concerned Christians are strongly left leaning is not surprising according to a long time active female member of Green Christian:

The Conservative Party of the recent two decades has got much further away from where most Green Christian principles would be. The old style Conservative Party of maybe 30/40 years ago would have had a lot of shared values….. Well, you know what our current government is like and doing…..a lot of their values are very much at odds with the values of what people that join an organisation like Green Christian are thinking.

(Hannah)

She then went on to recall how several years ago there was a member of Green Christian who was a member of the Conservative Party but over the years he

became more and more disillusioned with the Conservative Party until the point that he ended his membership

I know one of our members was a very firm Conservative until about 7 or 8 years ago. In fact he used to get quite annoyed if Green Party politics would come up on Celink but then he just found that the Conservatives, the current Conservative Party was just going so far from his own core values that he has left

(Hannah)

For many environmentally concerned Christians the policies and principles of right wing political parties are just so far removed from what they think needs to happen with society that they just simply can't vote for them.

6.7: Conversion

The following section will argue how activities by Green Christian and some of the behaviour of its members and supporters can be described as 'green conversion'.

As already said before many environmentally concerned Christians believe that a 'spiritual change' is needed because *'science tells us what we need to do, but for Christians it is faith that will give the freedom to do it'* (Storm of Hope 2015). Environmentally concerned Christians know the solutions and actions that need to be taken but they also all agree that there is a need for religious morals and religious teachings to spur Christians into action. As has been outlined earlier in the chapter, in order to make this needed spiritual change happen several approaches are used, but in an overarching way it can be said that environmentally concerned Christians are trying to convert fellow Christians to their 'green Christian faith'. During Green Christian meetings some members would enthusiastically tell how someone from their own church took a Green Christian magazine and found it interesting or showed interest in attention a Green Christian workshop. Such small things, sometimes it was as little as being allowed to put Green Christian flyers on display at church, were received with great joy and members were often urged to pray for the people who had shown interest. No matter how small the interest was, just accepting a Green Christian flyer was already enough to make those attending the meeting very hopeful about 'winning' someone for the 'Green Christian message'. Participants of workshops were also always encouraged to bring others along as well and spread Green Christian materials in their churches. For me it shows strong similarities with more evangelism activities in general. There are many similarities between the attempts of members of Green Christian to engage with Christians outside Green Christian and the way that churchgoers in my own church have tried to reach out to non-Christian friends, students, colleagues, family members and neighbours and how they responded to initial signs of interest. When

for example my fellow churchgoers hear about international students who are interested in reading the bible or attending church they too respond with joy and hopefulness and pray that these students will continue their interest in the Christian faith and may eventually convert. They as well actively seek to invite people to events, church services and distribute evangelistic flyers or other materials among family and friends. But especially the joy that both members of my own church and also other similar churches and members of Green Christian display when someone is interested in their message is very striking. Even small and early interest in met with joy, prayers and renewed motivation to work even harder to spread their message. At Green Christians there are only a few people who became interested in the environment through meeting other Green Christian members at their church (prior to becoming a member themselves) however, those that did become interested in the environment through fellow believers had a sort of conversion experience. Within Green Christian I have spoken with one man who became interested in environmental issues through Green Christian and prior to that he was not involved in environmental issues. He describes how it felt like he had discovered a new side to his faith. However, also other members who had been involved in environmental issues before described how at Green Christian they explored the links between their involvement and their faith and how for them being Christian now also had a 'green dimension'. For the man there is a clear difference between before he learned about Green Christian and after. Also, other members say that Green Christian has really changed their perspective on what is means to be a Christian. They now closely link faith and the environment, and this makes them more committed and motivated. Additionally, messages by Green Christian are often positioned in a way that emphasises Green Christian message as something different and distinctly different from the 'mainstream' Christian message but also as a much-needed message that will transform Christians. I think that it can be argued that some people who are active within Green Christian underwent some kind of 'green conversion' and that members of Green Christian are practicing some sort of 'green evangelism'. Such 'green conversions' are rare and within Green Christian there are only a handful of people who have such conversion experiences, but these experiences do display the potential of a convincing faith based narrative about the environment. Of course conversion is a very complex phenomenon that has been extensively studied by sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists and even human geographers (see Lofland & Stark 1965; Harding 1987; Rambo 1993; Loveland 2003; Gooren 2006; Barro et al 2010; Klaver 2011; Rambo & Bauman 2011; Woods 2012) and my observations during Green Christian events are difficult to turn into proof but they do reveal that many members of Green Christian view their own 'green Christianity' as something different and distinct from others forms of Christianity that others practice.

6.8: Struggling to make an impact

The next section will show that engaging fellow churchgoers about the environment is a struggle and that many environmentally concerned Christians are confronted with fellow churchgoers who have little interest in the environment. It will also argue that the decline of institutionalised Christianity limits the possibilities for many churches and faith-based organisations. However, a solution to the struggles faced by many environmentally concerned Christians will also be presented. The following sections will especially relate to the arguments as outlined in section 6.2.2.

6.8.1: Denial and inaction

Going out and engaging people about faith and the environment and perhaps making converts is not easy. In fact, it is hard and difficult and environmentally concerned Christians are met with disinterest, inaction and sometimes even hostility and denial. For many engaging their own church about environmental issues is disappointing. Fellow churchgoers and also church leadership have little interest in their concerns for the environment and are unwilling to give more space to environmental issues in church. Although some respondents did have no or few negative experiences, many of the participants said that environmental issues were regarded by 'too many' people in church as something for 'hippies', 'eco warriors' or members of the Green Party rather than an important issue for believers. For example, a female member of Green Christian and who was a member of an evangelical Church of England congregation recalled how people in church named her 'the green lady' and how someone accused her of *'bringing the Green party into church'* (Lucy) after she had suggested that her church should give more attention to environmental problems. Her vicar said that he would come back to her suggestion, but he never did until her husband contacted him and even then nothing happened. At the same time two vocal climate sceptics in church kept dismissing her concerns about the environment. It's seen as a 'hobby horse' was the comment of a participant during a workshop. Another female member of Green Christian and also a member of a 'middle of the road' Anglican Church, who suggested that her church should include an 'environmental prayer' during services was told by, what she described as 'strong characters', that such prayers were *'pointless and a waste of time'* (Bethany). The negative response by these 'strong characters' caused deep division among members of the worship committee at her church about whether an environmental prayer would be allowed during services. In the end environmental prayers did not became part of the services. The respondent blamed this failure on the fact that a few anti-environmental churchgoers managed to hijack the whole discussion. According to her there were no theological objections but her opponents '*just deny that climate change is happening*' (Bethany). A retired Anglican priest agrees with this and tells *'that's undoubtedly a reality, some have swallowed some of the misinformation which is*

undoubtedly being peddled around on the issue of climate change' (Robert). He then went on to tell how after mentioning climate change as a serious issue during services that one man emailed him links to climate change denial websites while another man also expressed his doubts about the human influence on climate change. After some discussion *'we just simply agreed to differ'* as the retired priest put it but he also immediately added that such encounters are very rare. Most of the time there is little response. Another long-time member of Green Christian described how she had talked with a man at her church about her attention to attend the Paris climate summit. However, after telling about her intention and her concern he replied by saying: *'well that all sounds really good but do you think that the scientists really got it right about climate change?*' This made her *'feel very sad'* (Anna) as she said herself.

Such direct denial and hostility isn't encountered by all environmentally concerned Christians. However, what many do encounter is indifference, inaction and disinterest with regard to the environment. Many environmentally concerned Christians feel like they are the only ones in their church who take the environment seriously. During an online discussion on the Green Christian discussion forum one participant said: *'it does seem like we are lone voices and fellow Christians seem to show little concern'*. This feeling of the being the only one in church or one of only a handful is shared by many.

I don't feel that there are a lot of other people within the local churches who are terribly concerned about environmental issues. They seem to… I don't know. I feel like there aren't lots of people who feel the same way as me about the environment.

(Anna)

As another member of Green Christian puts it. For many environmentally concerned Christians it seems like when they talk about the environment there just seems little attention and interest. *'Eyes glaze over'* (Hannah) when I try to talk about the environment or hand out materials as an active female member of both Green Christian and her local parish church said. Often it is difficult to get any sort of reaction. A female supporter of Green Christian and attender of her 'middle of the road' Anglican Church told how she organised an environment oriented churches. After the service had finished she and a few others who had organised the service wanted to know what people thought about the service. However:

Some were very hostile… Some were indifferent. We found it very difficult to get any response from our church actually.

(Bethany)

According to her, her fellow churchgoers *'appear to be indifferent. They weren't particularly enthusiastic about it which we found very disappointing'* (Bethany). She put lots of time and efforts in to it, only to be greeted by hostility and indifference. This indifference and just not being interested is encountered very often. For example, a female member of a Baptist church described how she tried to introduce car sharing at her local church as according to her it is good for the environment and '*because it's a way of getting to know other churchgoers in your area and it doesn't hurt to pick people up'*. But no matter how hard she tried she couldn't get anyone interested in car sharing. She described this as *'quite destressing'* (Catherine). A male member of an Evangelical charismatic church (without their own building) told during a Green Christian workshop how he wanted his church to replace plastic single use coffee cups with recyclable cups and suggested this idea to the leadership. The idea was interesting according to his church leader but it was not taken up as the issue was *'not on the agenda currently'*. During a Green Christian workshop, making fellow Christians more interested in environmental issues, was described as an uphill battle and someone attending the workshop remarked during a discussion that '*churches aren't ready to hear us'*. Many participants said that in their own church there is little attention for the environment during sermons, bible studies or other church related activities. They *'don't feel the urgency'* was another attendant commented. Some respondents also had stories about how during events about the environment, nobody apart from the organisers, showed up and all the efforts that they had put into it seemed wasted. For example, after the failure of the environmental prayer, the earlier described Anglican lady was allowed together with a few others to organise prayers meetings in advance of the Paris climate talks. Unfortunately, nobody showed up for the prayer meetings.

'*Before the COP21 each month we had an hour of prayer at church completely organised about environmental matters, what we hoped to get out of COP21 and all that. But apart from us, nobody ever came to it. It was a lost thing.'*

(Bethany)

Among environmentally concerned Christians there is a feeling that the environment is an outsider issue that they bring into the church. They are *'the green lady'* or *'those people who are interested in the environment'* as the chaplain of Green Christian told. The environment is not seen as part of the Christian message but rather as something that a small group of environmental enthusiasts bring into church. As such many environmentally concerned Christians are struggling to get their message across. This is really frustrating for these environmentally concerned Christians since they as explained believe that the

environment is central to the Christian faith. But also because they believe that Christianity has so much good to offer in terms of providing teachings, ethics and moral that can spur people on to take action but so little is done with all these Christian resources and therefore the environment is just seen as a political and scientific issue that 'others' can address. This something that deeply frustrates environmentally concerned Christians.

6.8.2: Decline

However, there is also another reason that prevents environmental issues from gaining importance in churches. This reason is the ongoing decline of institutionalised Christianity throughout the Western world. This decline has been well documented (see for example McLeod & Ustorf 2003; Bruce 2002; Voas & Chaves 2016; Brenner 2016; Clements 2017) and this puts the ambitions of environmentally concerned Christians under pressure. Churchgoers are often elderly and church attendance is declining and this leads to a shortage of funding, volunteers and time. A male supporter of Green Christian explains how in his church:

There are really a lot of quite elderly and frail people who understandably it just takes them all their time just to live their everyday life. A lot of the congregation are 80 plus years old so we can't expect them to go on marches or digging a big community garden or something.

(Tom)

In a very similar way a recent member of Green Christian adds:

There are a lot of very elderly people and then there is a huge gap in age. Whereas I'm in this gap position and I'm 70. But it seems like I'm quite young in the church, where I shouldn't be.

(Catherine)

This put severe restrictions on any kind of engagement with the environment in churches. These limitations are felt by all environmentally concerned Christians. These limits are not only the large number of churchgoers that are too frail to help organise or attend 'green events' but also the absolute decline just makes it financially impossible to put solar panels on the roof or to insulate church buildings. It also puts pressure on clergy who often have to run whole parish groups with a decreasing budget. Several people told how their current church had no clergy or how their clergy have gone sick from overwork. In the end it leaves churches unable to engage with the environment. *'Nearly all the churches are worried about numbers, members and money'* (Phil) as a member of Green Christian put it. For

example, a former leader of a transition town project tried to get nearby local churches involved. His transition town project even started a workgroup to engage with churches. However, the local churches had no time to get involved. Not because they were doubtful about the idea but because they had to put all their time and resources into *'keeping their own show on the road'* (Pete) as the former leader described it. They didn't have the money, time or volunteers to get involved. In the end environmentally concerned Christians are often a minority within a minority as one attended of a Hope for the Future workshop said. Firstly, they are a minority because most people in the UK are no longer going to churches and are increasingly no longer identifying themselves as Christian. And secondly, a minority within a minority because within the minority that Christians form nowadays there is only a minority that is interested in the environment.

Also Green Christian itself is feeling the ongoing decline of institutionalised Christianity. A group of ageing volunteers is doing the bulk of work while there are very few younger members within the organisation. As the survey already showed the majority of members and supporters is aged 60 or older and there are few members younger than 40. This is especially clear during workshops, conferences or other events. During a national conference in 2015, that was organised by Green Christian in collaboration with other groups, and that was attended by 200 people there was also a special meeting for people in their 20's and 30's. Only 7 people, including three organisers attended. This low number reflects the difficulty that Green Christian faces in attracting younger people. The members of Green Christian are very well aware of this problem. The retired Methodist minister put it very strongly when he said:

Because the sort of membership that we got at the moment in Green Christian we can't go on being active much longer. So, unless we can find new young members we haven't got much future as an organisation but that's also true for the church as a whole.

(Harry)

During almost every meeting there were discussions about how to attract young people, Green Christian even commissioned an official report written by three young females about how to attract younger people. In recent years Green Christian has been quite successful in attracting 'ordinands' (people training for ordination) by offering them free membership and hoping that these new clergy will be influenced by the message of Green Christian and will able to spread the 'green message' to their future churches. And Green Christian has also redesigned its website to make it accessible on smartphones and they are thinking about ways

beyond membership that will enable people to financially support Green Christian. However, the large majority of its active members remain 60 or older.

6.8.3: Solution

Solving the issue of the decline of institutionalised Christianity is of course a whole problem on its own and far outside the scope of this thesis. However, this thesis will provide a suggestion on how to engage more Christians with environmental issues, including younger people. This will be done by using some example from my research with environmentally concerned Christians.

The thing that is very clear from the previous sections of this chapter is that although on national and international level faith leaders are expressing their support for environmental issues and find their words welcomed by academics, NGO's and activists on the local level many churches are very much struggling to incorporate the environment into church life. Often calls for actions by faith leaders are discussed (and criticised) in the (social) media but after that little else happens. Such distant and impersonal engagements that originate from higher up will most of the times fail to connect with most of the churchgoers. Instead, churchgoers need to be engaged by clergy, scientists or teachers or any churchgoer, who is concerned about the environment and who is attending the same local church. This will be explained and discussed using two brief examples from the fieldwork.

The first example is a Methodist lay preacher who wanted to appoint a Church Eco-officer but unfortunately no one applied for the post. So, instead he took up the post himself and started to set up a green fund through which church members could pay money to compensate for their own CO2 emissions. With the money from the fund and through grants he started to insulate the church building. His aim was to reduce the emission of the church and his actions did gain approval within the church, although very slowly, but not because of his aim to reduce emission but because it the improved insulation and efficient lighting brought substantial savings to the heating and electricity bills as he writes in the autumn issue of the Green Christian magazine in 2017. The treasurer of his church also agreed to switch to green electricity as the price of green electricity had fallen close to the average market price. He however also writes that not everybody was happy, and some churchgoers complained that the church was cold and poorly lit now. But after resigning from the post after five years the new Church Eco-officer was able to raise the funds for solar panels and make further improvements to reduce the emissions (and further reducing the utility bills) and the goal of reducing emissions gained even popularity more among churchgoers. Nowadays the church has ambitious building plans for a new building and is a fully gold certified eco-church of which most churchgoers are proud. In the article in the Green Christian

magazine he concludes despite his efforts *'some still do not see it as part of a Bible-based Christian mission'* but that in the whole local Methodist circuit *'a fair few support it enthusiastically'* (Green Christian magazine autumn 2017, p8). For many environmentally concerned Christians this example is really an ideal scenario and many wish that they could do something similar within their own church. It showed them that despite resistance, indifference and church decline making your church environmentally friendly and making your fellow churchgoers interested in the environment is still possible. At first the story was published only on the Green Christian forum, but other members of Green Christian insisted that he should publish this hopeful story in the Green Christian magazine as well.

The second example is somewhat the opposite of the first example but is also much more common among environmentally concerned Christians. This example is about a retired Anglican priest who during his ministry actively tried to make people interested in the environment but never had very much success. Churchgoers had little interest and a few even displayed climate change denial. But according to him it was not just disinterest and climate scepticism that had caused the lack of interest but according to him also the Church of England itself has never put the environment high on its agenda and most clergy don't perceive the environment as an important issue. In 1999 he left we church where he had been working as a rector but later he found out that in the town where that church was located a transition town initiative was started. He tried to find out whether the church was involved in the initiative and he hopefully *'expected that the church might be fully involved in it'*. However, he soon found out that *'there were a few individual members of the church who were involved'* (Robert) but the current rector and also the PCC (parochial church council) were not involved in the transition town initiative. The retired priest felt that it was a bit of a let-down and a pity because *'the church could have become a substantial supporter of what was going on and I know that in other places the church has become very much supporting the Transition Town movement'* (Robert). Apart, from a few individuals no one in the church thought that the church should or could play a role within the transition town. This was seen as a real shame by the retired priest and many other environmentally concerned Christians share this feeling. The Christian faith is so full of love and care for creation and the Christian faith can teach people much about why they should be involved in environmental issues, but so many believers are unaware of it or perhaps willingly ignore it. This makes many environmentally concerned Christians sad because for them this is such an important aspect of the Christian faith and without it their faith is empty.

However, these two examples show that despite all the good intentions of faith leaders it is the local environmentally concerned churchgoers who need to advocate the case of the environment within their own congregation. Distant

bishops, theologians or activists are not making the difference. The first example shows that when local churchgoers are committed and willing to pursuit their goal that it is possible and that over time a church can give the environment an increasingly big place in church life. This doesn't mean that things will be easy and much (early) progress will be guided by financial benefits rather than environmental concern and some will still refuse or ignore the environment despite all the efforts. But it does show that passionate believers who are concerned about the environment do have possibilities to bring the environment into their church. However, as the second example shows, if there are no environmentally concerned churchgoers or they do not have time to engage fellow believers than it is unlikely that their church will give more attention to environment. There needs to be engagement at the level of the local church. Local churchgoers who are willing to engage with their fellow believers in church are needed to give environmental issues any chance of becoming more prominent in church life. Without them it is very hard if not impossible. Making the environment more important within church life needs to start from the pews in the same church as those who are disinterested or sceptical are sitting in. Churchgoers are unlikely to be convinced by distant academic theologians or (arch) bishops and instead churchgoers need to be engaged by clergy, scientists or teachers or any churchgoer, who is concerned about the environment and who is attending the same local church. If churchgoers are engaged by people that are familiar to them and who they perceive as sharing similar values and who they personally know, then there might be much more trust and willingness to consider the relevance of environmental issues. Clergy, scientists, teachers and more generally fellow believers who see the importance of the environment need to sincerely engage with others in their church and explain to them why they think that environmental issues are important to them (not why scientists in general agree or why the Pope thinks it is important but talk about why they themselves think it's important). It is of course unavoidable that sooner or later topics like 'scientific consensus' or emission reduction will come to the table. Such polarised topics should always be accompanied by personal, patient and trusted interaction with fellow churchgoers rather than disagreement and resistance. Such a local church-based engagement needs to take place now otherwise environmental issues will soon become an elitist project for a select group of high-ranking clergy and a small group of activists that has little impact on the wider church.

Ending all the indifference and inaction towards the environment in churches is very difficult. As already explained earlier in the chapter religion by itself can't make believers more concerned or committed to the environment. It is through other factors that religion influences and strengthens commitment to environmental action. Focusing on theology and bible teaching alone will not make people more interested or concerned about the environment. If churchgoers need to be made

more interested and concerned about the environment, then not only needs there to be more engagement with eco-theology but there also needs to be attention to all the other aspects that influence people's perceptions and attitudes about the environment. If environmentally concerned Christians only focus making an accessible theology of creation care little will happen. Making Christians care about the environment also needs to include an understanding of the science that underpins the concerns about the environment and a willingness to take the needed political action. This will very difficult and it is likely that some churchgoers will oppose such moves, not because they disagree agree with the theology but rather because they disagree with the politics. Scholars have found that right wing and left wing individuals are convinced by different types of arguments (Feinberg & Willer 2013; Feinberg & Willer 2015; Wolsko et al 2016) and some conservative figures like the philosopher Roger Scruton and Russell Moore, who is the president of the of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention have started to propose arguments which might help to convince people with right wing preferences of the need of environmental action (see Scruton 2012; Moore 2014). But making the whole church interested in the environment will still be a long and difficult process.

6.9: Green Christian as a place of fellowship

The disinterest and occasional hostility against the environment do however have two very interesting consequences. Firstly, for many members of Green Christian the organisation Green Christian has become a sort of safe haven away from their disinterested fellow churchgoers. They see Green Christian is a place where they can meet likeminded Christians and built friendships and encourage each other during the difficult times. Secondly, because within many churches there is little attention for the environment and because there are so few Christian environmental groups almost all environmentally concerned Christians join secular environmental groups. This second aspect will be further studied in the next chapter.

For many members of Green Christian, Green Christian provides a community that they do not have within their local church. For example, the female that wasn't allowed to do her Fair Trade project at church said that Green Christian *'gives me a family to belong to although they are not around'* (Catherine). For her the similar minded members of Green Christian were like the family that she is lacking at her own church. Another male member simply commented: *'It is nice to be in touch with people who have similar ideas to yourself'* (Jonathan) while another active member commented that Green Christian is about: *'talking and doing things with like-minded people who are Christian and who care deeply about environmental issues'* (Hannah). For her Green Christian gave her the 'spiritual nourishment' that she needed as her own church hadn't been very interested in the environment. For

all the people that I spoke with Green Christian is a place away from their own disinterested church where they can feel welcomed and where there are people who share their experiences and their goals. And they were always open to new people who shared their ideas and commitment. *'We would be glad to have you as part of our fellowship'* (Harry) as a member told me. However, Green Christian is not only the place where environmentally concerned Christian can find encouragement and fellowship away from their inactive church but it also the place where they find friendship, encouragement and can strengthen their Christian faith while working with secular environmental groups. Often environmentally concerned Christians have very good relationships with other non-Christians in secular environmental groups and they share many concerns and commitments with each other but sometimes there are a few tensions and environmentally concerned Christians would like to see some more appreciation of their religious beliefs beyond the shared belief in scientific findings or common political ideology. This theme will be explored in the next chapter.

6.10: Negativity

The following section will discuss why environmentally concerned Christians seem to experience so much difficulty and hardship while during the focus groups negative experiences were completely absent and no participants told that they had experienced indifference or denial nor did any participant display indifference or denial. The following sections will especially relate to the arguments as outlined in section 6.2.3.

The churches were of course not committed eco-churches to a degree that some environmentally concerned Christians might desire and for many participants talking about the environment in a church setting was a new experience but there was also genuine interest in the environment during the focus groups. But still, why do environmentally concerned Christians seem to have so many negative experiences while the participants in the focus groups seem to be very open and interested in the environment? It is an easy way out to depict environmentally concerned Christians as seasoned activists who are simply trying to push churches too hard and demand too much change in a short time from their fellow believers. It is also very easy to argue that churchgoers who don't believe in climate change or think that the environment isn't relevant to Christianity didn't join the focus group in the first place. Although, I think that there might be some truth in the idea that there is a clash between the fast moving and progressive green ideas of environmentally concerned Christians and the willingness and speed to which 'ordinary' churchgoers can engage with 'green ideas' and integrate them into to their own church life. But I don't think that framing it as 'seasoned activists versus ordinary churchgoers' will be the whole story nor will the absence of a few climate change

denying churchgoers explain the difference between environmentally concerned Christians and the participants of the focus groups.

Some environmentally concerned Christians think that most resistance and disinterest originate from elderly churchgoers in more rural churches. The reasoning behind this idea is that they see elderly people as by definition more conservative and therefore less interested in the environment and that in small villages everybody is forced to attend the same church. Thereby forcing environmentally concerned Christians into the same pews as climate sceptics and others who have little interest in the environment. This then will lead to disagreement and frustrations and no action on environmental issues will be undertaken. However, this reasoning seems to be contradicted by the fact that environmentally concerned Christians from for example London or Bristol were also reporting struggles and it is also contradicted by the fact that many environmentally concerned Christians are 'elderly' themselves as the survey also clearly shows.

Perhaps, the reason why there was no indifference, inaction or denial during the focus groups can partly be explained by the fact that the focus groups provided an opportunity to explore the links between faith and the environment together as a church. Participants knew and trusted other participants and because this engagement with the environment involved them personally they really enjoyed themselves and were interested in the topic. The link between faith and the environment was no longer distant and impersonal. Of course, environmentally concerned Christians also engage with fellow believers on a personal level, but the focus group provided an opportunity to explore 'faith and the environment' together as a church rather through one on one conversation between an environmentally concerned Christian and a fellow believer. Such one on one conversations might quickly give an impression or feeling that environmentally concerned Christians are bringing their 'outsider concerns' into church and then churchgoers might oppose 'bringing the Green Party into church'. However, when churchgoers talk together as a group about green issues, led by a few environmentally concerned Christians, and also with the support of the church leadership, then churchgoers might be very open and willing to explore the links between their faith and the environment without getting bogged down in disinterest or polarisation. This support from local clergy might be important as also some studies suggest (see Djupe & Hunt 2009; Djupe & Gwiasda 2010; Hmielowski et al 2015). However, quite a few environmentally concerned Christians also told that their priest or minister wasn't particularly interested either. *'He is a bit of a wishy-wash. So, it's hard to know where exactly he would stand'* (Hannah) as one female member of Green Christian said. But the support from local clergy is important as one-on one conversations can quickly be seen as 'preaching' or as bringing 'outsider' concerns

into church as many environmentally concerned Christians have experienced. Without support of local clergy, setting up discussion groups about the environment with churchgoers, as was successfully done with the focus groups, or any other activity for that matter will be difficult and environmentally concerned Christians will be left with little else than having one-on one conversations. But having the local priest or minister on board will open up many resources and networks and might provide caring for the environment with additional local ecclesiastical credentials. Making the local priest and minister interested might be an additional challenge for environmentally concerned Christian but probably a necessary one.

Making all Christians 'green' will be impossible no matter how clear the scientific message might be or how convincing the theological reasoning might sound. But I also think that the negative experiences of many environmentally concerned Christians have to a certain extent been embedded into their expectations and outlook and secondly, I think that environmentally concerned Christians are sometimes just being so bogged down by disinterest and hostility that even the most convincing, interesting and theological sound arguments or ideas are not able to stir up any interest.

An example of how some environmentally concerned Christians are strongly focused their negative experiences is another Anglican priest who while telling about the indifference that he had encountered described how his church did have bronze eco-church status but how he felt that if he hadn't pushed the project himself that the church would have never gained the eco-church status. This example then seems to be strongly focused on the negative experiences that he had while working towards the eco-church status instead of celebrating the achievement of gaining the eco-church status nor did he seem to see the eco-church scheme as particularly useful to engage churchgoers with the environment. I do think that environmentally concerned Christians should cherish their achievements more and be proud of their achievements rather than focusing on the long and difficult way ahead. Church leaders and ordinary churchgoers should be positive and focus on the (small) improvements and use them to achieve bigger goals. For example, a female member of Green Christian and a churchgoer at a Church of England congregation in a small and more rural location described how her church had not much interest in the environment.

I mean it's not an unfriendly church. People are not anti the few of us who are concerned about environmental matters. It's just that they think that other things are probably more important. Keeping the church going is more important than going off and taking part in a demonstration or whatever.

(Elisabeth)

Making their church an eco-church or expecting churchgoers to go make all sorts of lifestyle changes was way too much but even though she felt disappointed by the lack of interest in her own church she still found opportunities to bring the environment into church. Around her church there is a churchyard which is always very neatly maintained. Some of her fellow churchgoers felt that in the churchyard *'everything should be very mown down and very tidy'* and her fellow churchgoers didn't *'like to see graves with things growing around them'* as she put it. But even though it was controversial she and some others were given permission to *'allow more things to grow, see what comes up and encourage more insect life and bird life'* (Elisabeth). However, as she was very much aware of potential resistance against their plans they did openly talked about their plans and gave everybody '*a chance to discuss what they feel is the best thing for them and the church and the space around it'*. In the end people plan was successful and now the church has even put swift boxes up. *'I think in small ways people are very pleased to do something'* (Elisabeth) she said. So, although this female just as the earlier mentioned priest had been faced with disinterest she was still able to achieve quite substantial change through relative small things like putting up swift boxes and this enabled churchgoers to experience the beauty of the natural world and this started to perhaps make them more open to the idea that the environment needs to play a more prominent role within their lives. Of course, this female member of Christian wanted to achieve more but there is already positive basis from which she and others can work.

Sometimes some environmentally concerned Christians are just faced with uninterested fellow believers and have seemingly exhausted all the tools to make them interested. For example, the already earlier mentioned female member of Green Christian explained how she wanted to make her church a bit greener by selling Fair Trade items that there related to Christmas at her church. More specifically she wanted to sell Fair Trade Christmas pudding kits and Christmas cake kits because helping those in third world countries *'is starting to help the environment'* (Catherine) and she also thought that children and young people who don't know how to make a Christmas cake or Christmas pudding themselves can be linked up with *'older people who are house bound'* but who know how to make cakes and puddings but who might need some help and who would enjoy some a visit during the Christmas season. She had already done a similar project at her previous church and there is was a success. The project would provide an opportunity to bring Fair Trade values and perhaps also creation care values into church and it would also stimulate contacts between different groups at church. So, for her the project would have lots of benefits. However, after making this suggestion to her church *'I was just laughed at'* as she puts it. This made her sad and disappointed and she was still very frustrated about this whole thing happening

to her while the interview took place. It is of course true that I have never spoken with the church in question and the reason for this refusal is unknown but whatever precisely happened it made this lady really upset about her own church. *'I'm so amazed, because this has never happened to me before'* (Catherine) she said. She went even so far as to say that *'I don't feel that I belong'* (to her church). However, she still didn't give up and made another suggestion. She suggested that the church services start a bit later to allow churchgoers go come to the church service by bus as the bus times and services didn't match. However, her fellow churchgoers looked at her like she came *'from out of space'* (Catherine) as she put it. She was very disappointed by this refusal to start the church services a bit later. Of course, it can be said that suggesting that the church time table needs to be changed to match with the bus times is an odd thing to do for a church that isn't particularly interested in the environment and is unlikely to receive a positive response for the church leadership. However, the refusal to allow a project that had already been a success at another church and which also covered Christian values about caring for those in need and caring for the elderly might stem from an unwillingness to make the church more outward looking and more engaged with the wider society. At least this was what the female strongly believed. But to continue pushing hard and urging churchgoers to consider the environment will probably do more harm than good in such a situation and therefore living by example and being open to questions from curious churchgoers is likely to be a more fruitful and less contested way.

6.11: Sincere faith and the environment

The following section will have an in-depth discuss whether environmentally concerned Christians are faith based environmental activists or whether they are ideologically driven environmental activists who happen to have a Christian background. Also, the following section will especially relate to the arguments as outlined in section 6.2.3.

It is easy to perceive the Christian background of many environmentally concerned Christians as having an outer faith-based coating over a framework of political ideology. And indeed, much research emphasises that ideology is a strong influence on whether people accept science, how much people care about environmental problems and whether they are willing to address environmental problems (as has been discussed in the literature review). During the fieldwork that it is indeed very clear that in part many environmentally concerned Christians are indeed in part driven by ideology and their belief in science. They passionately support the Green Party, have a strong dislike of the Conservative government and display a deep trust in the science that shows that humans are the cause of many environmental problems. But there is also more than science and ideology. For many environmentally concerned Christians the bible itself does contain a radical

message that needs to be put into practice. Restructuring the economy, moving away from economic growth, taking part in climate marches and opposing fracking are not simply positions that these Christians have because they align with their left-wing ideology, but they also adhere to these ideas because they perceive them as important or even vital parts of their Christian faith. For many environmentally concerned Christians caring for creation and protecting the environment demands seeking radical change, not only for themselves but also for the whole of society. For them it is a sincerely held religious belief that their Christian faith requires them to make radical choices like disinvesting from fossil fuels and refocusing the economy away from consumption and profits. These environmentally concerned Christians truly believe that demanding such radical action is central to their Christian faith and that a Christian faith that is stripped of this radical nature is void and empty. It might be a bit of an odd comparison but it seems that in the same way that some Evangelical and Catholic bakers, florists and Bed & Breakfast owners have 'deep and sincere religious beliefs' against serving same sex couples, similarly do many environmentally concerned Christian have 'deep and sincere religious beliefs'[46] that demand them to protect and care for the environment and seek changes that will enhance this protection and care.

This does however bring forward the question what the precise relationship is between religion and things like environmental concern, willingness to address environmental problems and the acceptance of the human role in climate change. Is there a direct influence from religion? Has it positive or negative influence, or perhaps none? As already discussed in the literature review there has been numerous studies trying to establish what the relation is. Many studies have found a negative relation while others found few links or both negative and positive influences from religion. However, I think that there is no direct relation between religion and somebody's environmental attitudes, believe in science or willingness to address environmental issues. Religion or faith alone is very unlikely to be directly shaping how people value or protect the environment. Rather religion plays a more indirect role through other factors. As is clear from this chapter and from other existing academic studies that people care about the environment and want to protect it because they have learned to respect and admire it from a young age, because they trust the science that underpins their environmental concern and because they are left leaning in their political beliefs[47]. If people have these

[46] 'Deep and sincere religious beliefs' and 'sincerely held religious belief' are phrases that the USA Supreme Court also uses when talking about people with religious objections against same sex marriage and anti-conception. See Masterpiece Cakeshop, Ltd., et al. v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission, p1 and Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc. p7. With using 'sincere religious belief' the UK Supreme Court uses identical language (see Lee v. Ashers Baking Company Ltd and others, p2)

[47] There are of course more factors that play a role in forming people' attitudes towards the environment and how willing they are to undertake action as already stated in the literature review. For an overview of these factors see Gifford & Nilsson (2014).

characteristics than their religious belief can provide an extra stimulus to care and protect the environment. Their faith can make their commitment stronger and provide a deep and sincere faith-based commitment to protect the environment and it can give believers a strong willingness to take radical action. In such a case religion provides a deep and sincerely religious underpinning of their environmental concern. Science and politics are contested and disputed and there will always be people who disagree with them, but religion provides a deep and sincere belief that can act as cement that keeps the scientific arguments and political motivations strong and makes people more committed and willing to address environmental problems. However, the reverse can also happen. When people grow up without engaging much with the environment, if they prefer individual freedom over collective action to address environmental problems, when they are sceptical about the scientific underpinnings of environmental concern and when they are right wing, then religion can provide further incentives to refrain from environmental action by emphasising humans superiority over the rest of nature, that God is always in control and won't permit such environmental disasters. In such a case rather than being a resource that can provide a faith-based incentive to care and protect the environment it provides a powerful faith-based incentive to refrain from action.

This indirect relationship with religion is also very clear among environmentally concerned Christians. The environmentally concerned Christians have been involved with environmental issues from a young age and science and politics are very important for them and form an important part of their concerns and motivations, but these concerns influence also their faith and seemingly secular problems like sea level rise and air pollution and political issues like emission reduction are seen directly relevant to their faith. For them it is clear that such issues require a response and their faith helps them to remain committed to action and keeps them motivated. This thesis does not engage with those who oppose environmental action on faith based grounds but the existing research on such individuals as already discussed in the literature review and also from the books and articles that are written by these individuals themselves reveal deep scepticism of almost all of the research that environmentally concerned Christians find so convincing while also being strongly opposed to any kind of environmental regulation or policy. But also, these people use concepts like stewardship and caring for creation but because they belief that humans have little role in many of the environmental problems these theological concepts fail to spur these people into action. In such cases the bible is used to emphasise the dominion that people have over nature and how God is in control over everything. Although in the UK such faith based environmental scepticism is very limited, only one Anglican bishop and a handful of other clergy support it (see Foster 2009; Forster & Donoughue 2015) within the USA it is on the rise and becoming a well-known and influential

force (McCammack 2007; Nagle 2008; Wilkinson 2012; Zaleha & Szasz 2014; Vincentnathan et al 2016). The most well-known faith-based sceptics group is the 'Cornwall Alliance'. Just like Green Christian this organisation claims to care and protect the environment on biblical grounds, but the Cornwall Alliance and Green Christian have very little in common and have completely opposite agendas. Whereas Green Christian firmly beliefs in climate science, criticises the inaction of politicians on environmental issues and seeks radical action to address the unsustainable lifestyle that many people have, the Cornwall Alliance is the complete opposite. The Cornwall Alliance attacks climate science as flaky and doomsday thinking (Sadar 2018; Jayara 2018a) and praises president Trump and former EPA chef Scott Pruitt' attempts to roll back environmental regulation (Beisner 2018; Jayaraj 2018b; Beisner 2017a) and also criticises Pope Francis for his opposition to fossil fuels (Burnett 2018) and urges the Catholic church to return its original mission of spreading the gospel (Beisner 2016). For the Cornwall Alliance it also makes 'perfect sense to pull out of the Paris accord' and it thinks that 'the rest of the world should follow' (Beisner 2017b). It has even published on its website an article called 'Ten religious reasons against climate change' (Powell 2018). The Cornwall Alliance also sees environmentalism as something deeply anti-Christian and dangerous that should be opposed (Wanliss 2012) and often emphasises that humans have dominion over nature and argues that the earth is strong and resilient, and that God would not have made an earth that is:

'susceptible to catastrophic degradation from proportionally small causes, and consequently we deny that wise environmental stewardship readily embraces claims of catastrophe stemming from such causes'

Such statements are mixed with an endless list of articles that espouse climate change denial (See for example Sadar 2018b; Jayaraj 2018c; Jayaraj 2018d; Spencer 2016). However, it is important to note that the Cornwall Alliance and Green Christian both claim to be founded on biblical principles. Many environmentally concerned Christians claim that their radical views are inspired by their desire to be stewards of God's creation but the Cornwall Alliance claims the same and says that it seeks to promote 'Biblical earth stewardship' (see https://cornwallalliance.org/about/what-we-do/). As such environmentally concerned Christians and the Cornwall Alliance take the same theological concept in completely different directions and are in many aspects each other's opponents. As such it demonstrates how the concept of stewardship can be used for two completely opposed agendas and how a theological concept can have very positive impact on care and concern for the environment but also how it can have a deeply negative impact. It shows how on its own religion doesn't have a direct influence but shows how other factors like political ideology and trust in science can make religion into a force that can work for the environment or against it.

It might seem that a right wing, faith-based climate change denying group from the USA has little to do with UK churchgoers or the question how environmentally concerned Christians engage with the environment. However, as has been explained many environmentally concerned Christians are in fact confronted with inaction and climate change denial. And interestingly, although I was aware of faith-based scepticism before, the first time that I was directly confronted by it was when someone at my own church who knew about my PhD research forwarded me a link to the Cornwall Alliance website with the comment that I might find it interesting. This person wasn't necessarily a climate sceptic and he just wanted to be helpful, but it is very interesting to see how the ideas of an American faith-based climate change denial group travel all the way to Christians in Exeter.

However, it also does show how faith-based environmental concern is deeply entwined with scientific arguments and ideological reasoning and that a faith-based concerned on its own doesn't make a believer greener or more environmentally concerned. Instead faith-based environmental concerns build on and provide further strength to existing scientific and ideological environmental concerns by providing these contested concerns with a fundament that goes beyond science and ideology and thereby strengthens already existed environmental concerns.

6.12: Conclusion

This chapter has tried to answer two sub-research questions. The first question focused on the eco- theology of environmentally concerned Christians and tried to find out how these environmentally concerned Christians relate to the environment. In the chapter it was argued that many environmentally concerned Christians often have been interested and involved in environmental issues from a young age. Although their theology isn't necessarily much different from the focus groups, also environmentally concerned Christians use stewardship and justice to theologically argue that the environment is important and should be cared for. However, the centrality of the environment within their faith makes them stand apart from other Christians. Being a Christian without being 'green' is impossible and if you're a disciple of Jesus then you must care and protect the environment as well. Loving God' creation is a 'Way of Life' and not something than would be left to activists or 'experts'. This idea that the environment is very important and central component to the Christian faith is shared by all. Convincing fellow believers of the centrality of the environment to the Christian faith is not only done with theological arguments but also with scientific and ideological reasoning. In the end environmentally concerned Christians have a 'deep and sincere religious belief' that their Christian faith commands them to take radical action against environmental problems. They see their 'green faith' as something very distinct and as something that many

ordinary churchgoers are lacking but also as to which believers can be converted. Within this complex mix of caring for the environment, conversion, science and politics the role religion of religion be quite hard to separate from other influences. Faith on its own can't make people care about the environment however, if they for example have been brought up in a family where caring for the environment was important, if they accept the scientific underpinnings of the environmental problems and they are left wing leaning, than their religious belief can make their commitment to caring for the environment stronger and provide a deep and sincere faith based commitment to protect the environment and it can give believers a strong willingness to take radical action. In such a case religion provides a deep and sincerely religious underpinning of their environmental concern. However, if people are sceptical about the scientific underpinnings, didn't have a 'green upbringing' and have a right leaning political ideology then their religion can become a force that discourages them from undertaking environmental action and can provide a faith-based grounding to their refusal to undertake action. In these cases, religion has often the same theological basis and is used by both sides but taken into completely opposite directions and this shows how influenced by other factors religion can be used both for good and for worse.

The second research question focused on the experiences of environmentally concerned Christians and in what ways they are successfully trying to bring the environment into church. Although many environmentally concerned Christians are trying to bring the environment into their church, this isn't easy, and many are left disappointed and frustrated by all the inaction, indifference and sometimes even denial. Many environmentally concerned Christians feel that for many churchgoers the environment is an 'outsider issue' that activists, experts or 'others' can do rather than churchgoers themselves. Also, the decline of institutionalised Christianity is limiting the possibilities for environmentally concerned Christians. These problems are very real and form major obstacles for any attempt to give the environment a more central position within church life. At national and international level faith leaders have been very active at promoting the environment and urging believers to act. But these words have not brought the by many expected surge in interested and commitment to environmental causes. Instead, high ranking faith leaders and environmental activists are struggling to make believers interested. Engaging churchgoers will be hard and will require much more than changing theology as religion itself doesn't make churchgoers 'green' but religion becomes green or brown (anti-environment) through other factors, such as accepting the conclusions of climate scientists or political ideology, and then in turn religion will provide a faith-based grounding for these factors and strengthen them. Making religion green is only one part of a wider need to make whole society greener. However, a 'green' religion can provide a 'deep and sincere' faith-based belief that radical action to protect the environment is needed. But in order to make religion

‘green’ it is essential that pro-environmental messages by national faith leaders are being followed up by interaction at the local church setting. Without church-based engagement all statements, speeches and talks by high ranking faith leaders will have little effect. Local engagement isn’t easy but having people in pews speak up for the environment is very important as several examples have shown. Engaging fellow believers about the environment is hard and long process and for some believers their ideological objections will be too strong, but it is very important that believers do it in order to protect God’s creation.

Chapter 7:

Working together for the natural world within a secular environment

7.1: Introduction

In the previous chapter it was argued that environmentally concerned Christians have a deep and sincere belief that demands them to take radical action against environmental problems. This desire to undertake radical action does not only include 'converting' fellow churchgoers but also includes collaborating with secular groups and getting involved in politics. As the survey results already showed, almost 80% of all the members and supporters of Green Christian are involved in secular environmental groups themselves and all the respondents want churches to get more involved in the politics surrounding environmental issues. This then will unavoidably bring environmental concerned Christians and their religious beliefs into society wide (political) efforts to address environmental problems. Habermas is very cautious of such explicit faith based political ambitions and instead prefers religion to be translated into an 'inspiring energy' for all (Habermas 2006, p17) rather than remaining openly religious. But instead of further critiquing Habermas from a philosophical angle this chapter seeks to understand how Christians with a deep faith-based concern for the environment navigate between faith and their involvement with the wider secular green movement and how they establish common ground with the secular groups in which they are involved and what role their faith is allowed to play in all of this. It will use the work by human geographers but also others about postsecularity and the critique of this work as given in chapter 3 of this thesis in order to understand the collaboration between those with a Christian faith and those without one in the context of environmental issues. The chapter will work mostly from the perspective of Christians who are active in secular environmental groups but does also include perspectives from people holding leadership positions within secular environmental groups from the Exeter area. With these (former) leaders of secular groups the focus of the interviews was on the relevance of religion for secular organisations. The central question that this chapter will answer is:

How are environmentally concerned believers finding common ground with secular groups and how do they collaborate with each other? And to what extent are secular groups willing to give space to faith-based motivation?

Although often philosophical in nature, assumptions about the nature of religious reason and the role that they can have, do have real consequences for environmentally concerned Christians who want to collaborate with other non-Christian organisations. Demands for neutrality or demanding that believers do not 'annoy others with their beliefs' are often heard and can have far reaching consequences for believers and organisations who are being targeted by such demands. For example, if Green Christian would attempt to translate its message into something more widely appealing in order to collaborate with others, will the radical nature of its original faith-based message be lost? And can members and

supporters of Green Christian do their work without openly adhering to their sincere and deep faith when they collaborate with non-Christians? However, the reverse is also true. If Green Christian decides to oppose any attempt to alter its explicit faith-based message and if they refuse to translate their radical message, will they have any success is collaborating with others? Members and supporters of Green Christian are already struggling to make churches interested in their message and if they also refuse to alter their message towards the wider society, will Green Christian itself become a small and marginalised group of faith based environmental activists that have little influence in neither church life nor the wider society?

As already explained in the postsecularity chapter, working together on environmental issues is very different from other social issues. Literature on postsecularity has argued that faith-based organisations working on issues like homelessness, refugees or substance abuse have been opening up towards others from different or no faith backgrounds who share the same commitment to address these issues. This coming together of various organisations and individuals from a variety of faith based and secular backgrounds to work together on shared concerns about for example urban poverty or the ongoing refugees' crisis has been described as 'postsecular rapprochement' by Cloke & Beaumont (2012). However, as already briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, most environmentally concerned Christians are active in secular environmental groups (almost 80% according to the survey) and this indicates that participating within secular environmental groups is almost the default option for many environmentally concerned Christians. This then presents some very relevant questions about what the common ground is between these environmentally concerned Christians and the secular groups that they are involved with. For example, to what extent are environmentally concerned Christians allowed to openly 'use' their faith within these organisations and to what extent is their faith-based motivation being used as 'inspiring energy for all'? These questions are all closely linked to the main research question and the aim of this chapter to provide insights into the answers to these questions.

7.2: Outline chapter

7.2.1: Working together

This final empirical chapter will argue several things. Firstly, this chapter will argue many environmentally concerned Christians are involved in secular groups and that they view their involvement as a way to get more practically involved in environmental issues. Most of them are very happy with their involvement in secular groups and that they see many shared concerns and common grounds

between them and secular groups. But it will also be argued that for them being involved in secular groups has also strong theological underpinnings and that they think that Christians should be involved and visible in the wider society.

7.2.2: Struggling with religion

Secondly, it will be argued that although environmentally concerned Christians are happy with their involvement they also feel that there is very little space for their religious beliefs and that their beliefs are often ignored and seen as something private with little relevance to the wider organisation. The complementary learning process that should take place between those with faith backgrounds and those without faith, as Habermas argues, doesn't seem to be taking place. While environmentally concerned Christians are actively embracing many of the positions and arguments of the green movement this is not reciprocated. This exclusion of faith causes harm and frustration among environmentally concerned Christians. There will also a more theoretically explanation aspect to this section of the chapter which will argue that within the context of environmental problems there is often a strong focus on the sheer size and influence that religious institutions have and how these characteristics can hugely benefit the reach and influence of the environmental movement but that there is no move beyond the appreciation of the institutional aspects of religion and that the deeply held beliefs of environmentally concerned Christians remain excluded.

7.2.3: Giving space to religion

Thirdly, this chapter will make a statement about the exclusion of religion within secular environmental groups. It will argue that for many environmentally concerned Christians faith and environmental concern are deeply related and that attempting to separate the two causes harm and disappointment and that excluding faith will prevent others from gaining insights from faith-based teachings. It will also argue that similarly to Habermas, Rawls and Audi within environmental organisations there seems to be sometimes an unfounded fear that eventually believers will always seek to impose their faith upon others. But environmentally concerned Christians strongly oppose this view and say that they are first and foremost involved in such organisations because they care about the environment, want to help address environmental problems and that they have no intention to impose their faith upon others or that they are unwilling to listen to other views. Similarly, to the theoretical postsecularity chapter it will be argued that there is little reason to impose restraints on religious reason within secular environmental organisations.

7.2.4: Stewardship

Fourthly, there will be a discussion about whether Christian ideas about environment are able to find their way into more secular thinking. It will be argued that Christian ideas remain very marginal and that it is mostly Christians who incorporate Christian eco-theology with scientific and economical arguments to convince their fellow believers of urgent action. However, the exception is the concept of stewardship. Stewardship has been used for many years in discussions about sustainability and beyond and has also become a well-known concept within fields such as medicine, law and also management. Although these fields use stewardship in different ways they all have a common feature. Namely, that stewardship is never about radical and abrupt change but rather is about making adjustments within existing frameworks and trying to improve current approaches rather than proposing radical new ones. This lack of radicalism and its perceived conservativism has often been the focus of criticism (also from within Green Christian). However, this chapter will argue that stewardship has the ability to not only cross the secular/religious divide but also possesses the ability to cross the ideological divides which are so incredible powerful when it comes to environmental issues. Lastly, there will be a conclusion for this chapter.

7.3: Christians joining secular groups

7.3.1: Christian duty

In the previous chapter it was explained how environmentally concerned Christians have a deeply religious commitment to addressing environmental problems and how this religious commitment is entangled with other factors that make people committed to addressing environmental problems such as childhood upbringing, ideology and trust in scientific research. This section will look why environmentally concerned Christians are involved with secular groups. It addresses the first point of the chapter outline.

For environmentally concerned Christians an important aspect of their religious commitment is that the Christian faith should not be some kind of internalised or inward looking spiritual force but rather an outward looking and with society engaging belief that seeks to improve the life of all. As the survey results already showed, all or almost all environmentally concerned Christians are involved in some way in secular environmental groups, prefer the church to be politically involved and encourage secular and faith-based groups to collaborate. However, this strong desire for a politically active church that seeks to change society does not just originate from their own involvement in politics or activism, nor does it originate from their struggles and frustrations within their own church. Instead, for environmentally concerned Christians being active in secular groups has a clear

theological foundation. Often involvement in politics and secular groups is seen as one of the key aspects of their faith and a faith that doesn't involve going out and addressing societal problems and collaborating with non-Christians is seen a faith with little use or value. Being involved in society is vital to their faith. For example an active member who was also active in the leadership of Green Christian stated that:

My Christian duty is to pray, is to worship and to be armed with the spirit and to go out and make a difference.

(Adam)

A retired Anglican priest stressed how being a Christian cannot be done in isolation from the rest of society and how being a Christian requires people to take action against a whole host of social issues and problems that are present in society.

You cannot isolate your faith, you cannot isolate the life of the church, you cannot live in a little religious bubble, we have to live in the world as it is and deal with the reality of the world as it is

(Robert)

In a somewhat similar way the chaplain of Green Christian argued that believing that God is the Creator of heaven and earth without feeling responsibility to address the many environmental problems is impossible and that the presence of a Creator makes protecting His creation a task that Christian cannot ignore, no matter whether they are at home, at work, in church or somewhere else in society.

I find it very difficult to know how a faith which states as it fundamental belief that the Lord God made all things, how it is then possible not to be involved in a 'daily way' and in a 'movement way' and in a neighbourhood, national and international way, or wherever we can in changing those behaviours which destroy creation? It doesn't make sense to me to say I'm sorry about what is going on but I'm going on with my life. For me that is not Christianity.

(Andrew)

Another supporter of Green Christian argued that her support and involvement with secular environmental groups aligns with the biblical idea of being salt and light of the world (Matthew 5, verse 13-16). According to her:

I think it's part of being salt and light. And if you just stick to your own all the time then you can't be salt and light in the sense that Jesus wants. You have to go where there is darkness because if you just stick to places where the light is shining or keeping the light to yourself it is not needed.

(Jenny)

It is important to emphasise that she doesn't view secular groups as dark and unwelcoming places, in fact she is an active member of a local conservation charity. She rather emphasises that Christians should go out and put their intensions to good use outside their own group so that the rest of society can also benefit. Following Matthew 5 verse 15 which states, *'Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house',* she argues that Christians who are concerned about the environment should go out and join others and share their concerns and undertake collective action. Christian should be a light to the world. For her addressing environmental problems meant going out and working together with others in her local conversation charity and this is according to her being the light and salt of the world. According to her it is no good to care about the environment only within the context of your own church or faith group. *'We are God's hands and feet'* as one attendant of a Green Christian meeting put it. This opposition against retreating into an *'ecclesiastical bubble'*(Robert) as one respondent described it is strongly shared by many environmentally concerned Christians and they see going out into society as a very important aspect of their faith and as something that is unavoidable. One recent member of Green Christian put it very simply by saying: *'as Christians we need to be involved with other people*' (Catherine). The earlier mentioned retired Anglican priest completely agreed with this and stated:

Absolutely, I think that it is fundamentally important that the church does not act alone in this but is seen, engages with everybody else who is equally concerned.

(Robert)

The thing that many respondents emphasise is that without collaborating or joining secular groups, believers, churches and faith-based organisations will become very isolated and the rest of society will pay little attention to them and as such active collaboration and involvement in secular environmental groups is needed. Otherwise faith based environmental concerned Christians will not be heard by the rest of society. For example, a male who wasn't a member of Green Christian but very supportive about their aims said about getting involved with secular groups the following:

Well, yes I do because otherwise we are an irrelevant minority. I don't know what percentage of people in this country goes to church currently but it is certainly a very low percentage in Peterborough. And certainly amongst influential opinion forming people it can be a very low percentage as well. I think if we want Christianity to be relevant, if we want to reach those people than we have to be involved where they are involved and taking part in what they are concerned with.

(Tom)

Others express similar ideas and argue for example, *'you get very insular if you just only involved in church matters, internal church matters that is*' (Hannah) or 'if not (getting involved outside churches) we become isolated' (Phil). While another member of Green Christian who was active in various conservation efforts and a retired geography teacher states:

I think if we're only involved in our own churches and parallel organisations than how are we going to meet anybody else? So I think in order to have a presence in the world, in order to witness to other people we need to be involved in secular organisations.

(David)

Others also just preferred more practical oriented actions and didn't like long theological discussions about what Christianity teaches about the environment and just wanted to get practically involved in local conservation work and as such joined secular environmental groups. For example, the member who earlier talked about being salt and light to the world said:

I think we're doing too much talking and we should go out with groups that are doing local conservation work.

(Jenny)

Similarly, a member of Green Christian who is also involved in organising activities for Green Christian argued that after all the calls for actions by faith leaders and all the conferences it was now time to get practically involved and actually start collaborating:

After international conferences and calls for action we have to get involved locally. This is so important. Rather than just going to church meetings all the time we have to go out and get involved locally. Friends of the Park or a local environmental campaign. It should be on all levels.

(Adam)

So, as has been described above environmentally concerned Christians see working together with non-Christians as an important requirement of their faith but it is also seen as a necessity that is caused by the ongoing decline of institutionalised Christianity and some environmentally concerned Christians also just want to get involved with environmental issues on a practical level. However, it is important to emphasise that environmentally concerned Christians don't see Christianity as the only foundation or a superior set of ethics which enable people more successfully to be concerned about the environment. They openly acknowledge that people with different faiths or without faith can be just as motivated or committed to addressing environmental issues. For example, a Quaker and leader of a Transition town project said the following:

Caring about people is caring about climate change. In all the religions there is a lot about caring for others. That says that this would be something really important and that we should do more than we are. Also this whole thing about simplicity in terms of our life style. It is an important thing in religions. If we do live a simpler life we will reduce our carbon footprint. I think there is a lot within the religions.

(Pete)

And another member of Green Christian, who was involved in leading a community garden project in his home town, described how his fellow members of the community garden project might not be Christian but certainly do care about the environment and have many shared concerns and common grounds with the members who are Christian:

If you scratch the surface there are a good few people who either go to church or who are very sympathetic to Christianity and certainly even atheists or anti-Christian people who are involved very often might have a lot in common because they tend to be people who are very opposed to materialistic consumer lifestyles and value quietness, nature and things like that. But they tend to be people who identify themselves as spiritual but not necessarily Christian.

(Tom)

Another member of Green Christian, who was involved in a community energy project said about the importance of a Christian basis for environmental concerns that although:

…….*my Christian faith is part of my motivation for it but you don't have to be a Christian to care for Creation and to be concerned about environmental matters.*

(Anna)

The chaplain of Green Christian took up an even more radical position and argued that:

I don't think that Christian action for the planet is any more worth or effective than anyone else's? I really delight in the fact that people of other faiths and no faith as they might put it are also consumed with the desire to heal the planet to heal the people and to work for the planet and against it destruction.

(Andrew)

In a similar fashion the member of Green Christian who had used the light and salt comparison argued that:

I think that people who are very much in touch with their environment, many of whom are not Christians…… I think that what they have been doing must have been very pleasing to our Creator. Possibly more pleasing than my own behaviour.

(Jenny)

As such, although environmentally concerned Christians perceive their own Christian faith to be an important motivator for their personal involvement with environmental issues, they also see that other non-Christian beliefs or secular ethics might just be as capable in spurring people on into taking action against environmental problems. Such an acknowledgement that their Christian faith isn't more capable or better suited, that other faiths and moral codes are just as good in stirring up concern for the planet and that much common ground exists between the followers of different faiths and life philosophies when it comes to environmental issues. However, it is also important to highlight that some argue that organisations with an explicit religion are better able to embed their concerns and as such give a deeper motivation and commitment.

I don't think we have a specific role, but Christians have a good basis, a good spirit, a good embedding for their activism. Sometimes secular groups just hear about justice without basis and maybe Christians can say, 'he look we have a core that helps us', we have a whole theological framework to form our activism but I don't think we have a special role actually.

(Thomas)

However, the open and reflexive mind set by many environmentally concerned Christians seems to suggest that at least from the side of Green Christian there are certainly opportunities for postsecular rapprochement around environmental issues. This will be further discussed later in this chapter.

7.3.2: Working together on practical and pragmatic grounds

This section will still focus on the first point of the chapter outline but it will now focus on the more practical and pragmatic aspects of why environmentally concerned Christians choose to join secular environmental groups.

As discussed above, environmentally concerned Christians are deeply committed to collaborating with other non-Christians and see many commonalities between their own concerns and those of other secular and non-Christian faith groups. Therefore, the following section of this chapter will go beyond the intentions of environmentally concerned Christians and examine in which secular environmental groups they are involved and how they are able to collaborate with others in these groups.

Environmentally concerned Christians are involved a wide range of secular environmental groups such as energy communities, Transition town initiatives, various outdoor education programs, local woodland trusts, campaigns against fracking, community gardens and a wide range of other local conservation charities. They are also involved in large national groups like Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace and the RSPB and also in political parties like the Green Party, Labour and Liberal Democrat (not the Conservative Party) or environmental subgroups of these political parties and also, they support the National Trust. Their involvement in these secular groups varies from donating money to the large national groups to chairing transition town initiatives, lifelong involvement with local charities, participating in protest marches and setting up local renewable energy initiatives. Some members of Green Christian have also resorted to the use of non-violent direct action as a way to spur the government into action on especially the issue of climate change as they argue that there is very little time left to undertake action. Within Green Christian the non-violent direct-action approach is very visible through the organisation ‘Christian Climate Action’ and although this organisation is not directly related to Green Christian itself, several members of Green Christian are involved with Christian Climate Action and have been arrested for their actions. The actions of Christian Climate Action are often part of larger demonstrations, although they sometimes do actions on their own, but they are always clearly identifiable as Christians through banners and they incorporate Christian symbols and rituals like kneeling, praying and hymn singing into their protests. During the interviews with members of Green Christian it was clear that quite a few members had sympathies for their non-violent direction action approach although they themselves wouldn’t take part in non-violent direct action.

I was very encouraged for example when I small group of Christian climate protesters did some whitewashing outside the department of energy and climate change and they were charged and you know I was very pleased and I supported what they had done and it was something that I could share with some of my other friends who are that kind of activist but not Christian.

(Jonathan)

However, although many environmentally concerned Christians have deep theological convictions about why they favour joining secular environmental groups, when asked why they joined a specific organisation or cause they often have surprisingly practical and pragmatic answers that often emphasised shared (political) agendas, shared concerns about the environment or other practical reasons. For example, the earlier mentioned retired priest emphasised how he was involved with organisations that were just like him 'very much concerned with the preservation of the natural world':

I support Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth and I belong to RSPB and the Woodland Trust. These are things that have an environmental flavour and they are certainly all very much concerned with the preservation of the natural world. So, yes I'm involved with those.

(Robert)

While the retired Methodist minister who was also organising activities for Green Christian explained his involvement with secular groups by emphasising how:

It's just the sort of thing that takes forward a personal interest and I've got an opportunity to do it now because I'm not working fulltime for the church. And that's good.

(Harry)

The importance of personal interest was also emphasised by the earlier mentioned retired geography teacher who was also a supporter of Green Christian. He openly admitted that he got involved with one particular outdoor education group because of benefits that he got from their resources

The main reason I got involved is partly self interest in that I got useful information from them and also party because I was supporting what they stood for and in some cases I was able to do some practical work for them too.

(David)

But they also added that he is more practically involved with various other secular environmental groups because he shares their goals and because they are committed to care for the environment just like he is:

In terms of practical work it has mainly been the wildlife trust in Essex and now up here in Suffolk. Since have been up here I have also been involved in the Transition movement. Helping the local transition group with one or two things like gardening and discussions about reducing reliance on fossil fuels and I also belong to the 'Ramblers Association' because I think it's important for people to be able to access the countryside and enjoy it freely. I'm also a member of the National trust which does also manage land as well as buildings. They're concerned for biodiversity as well.

(David)

Another supporter of Green Christian told how she had been really busy setting up a solar farm in her local village and although this project didn't originate from a church initiative, several church members were involved in the project. However, church or faith wasn't her biggest motivator to be involved in this project but rather her conviction that renewable energy was the way forward and that current government failing in regard to this task:

Our government has pulled back on encouraging renewable energy. I just feel that they haven't….. The way they have discouraged things like wind farms and so on. I just feel that that it is backwards rather than forwards. But yes, I do think, the more that we can do to live sustainably the better.

(Elisabeth)

Others simply stated that their involvement with various secular organisations came from the shared the concerns between them and these organisations.

Well, Friends of the Earth was because of my growing concern about the awareness of the effect that human beings were having on the planet. How we are destroying species and damaging the land and everything.

(Anna)

Similarly, another recent member of Green Christian explained that she supports secular organisations that *'are helping'*. As examples she gave her involvement with the Woodlands trust because they *'are trying to ensure that our environment is being cared for'* and her support for the organisation 'Garden Organic' as this organisation *'encourages people to grow food organically'* and that was something that she felt was very important. Some also said that working together with secular

groups was needed because otherwise faith based groups would have to do everything by themselves which would be impossible. This was strongly emphasised by a female who was involved in leading Green Christian:

It would be very foolish to reinvent the wheel and do it all ourselves. Good Lord, we can't. So, it makes much more sense to collaborate and work with secular groups that are working in the same areas

(Hannah)

So, although environmentally concerned Christians have theological arguments to favour and encourage involvement with secular groups often the actual involvement is explained by environmentally concerned Christians in terms of shared concerns for the environment and with practical reasons in mind. The environmentally concerned Christians are seemingly pragmatic and have a more practical collaboration in mind above anything else. From the examples above it becomes clear that at least from the side of the environmentally concerned Christians collaborating with secular groups is mostly focused on finding shared concerns about climate change, air pollution or species loss and the perceived political, economic and societal solutions to these problems and that explicit spiritual or faith based ideas or the acceptance of such ideas within secular environmental groups doesn't seem to play an important role for such collaborations.

However, before continuing further in this chapter it is important to emphasise that many environmentally concerned Christians are quite happily involved within secular organisations and have no intention to stop doing so in the future. Especially those who, as explained in the previous chapter, are faced by a disinterested or numerically declining church find the interest and concern for the environment that they find within secular groups a great relief compared to their struggles with their own churches. Sometimes non-Christian members of secular groups are even described as better friends or more helpful than fellow churchgoers as was the case with a participant of a Green Christian workshop that I met. Another example of such feelings is that of an emeritus professor who is a supporter of Green Christian and who also had invested money into a community energy initiative. Similarly to the earlier examples he strongly emphasised the shared concerns and aims with the non-Christians with the energy community.

Well, if your committed to work for a better environment, you have to join with other people who have similar aims. They don't have to be Christians, they have to share those aims. Usually, you go along very well with them.

(Ian)

However, he went to argue that between him and his fellow participants in the energy community was a better 'fellow feeling' as he described than with his fellow churchgoers. His words were: *'There is often better 'fellow feeling', I would use that word, in these organisations than there would be in a church'*. This is according to him because:

Because you committed your lifestyle and your money to renewable energy is the key thing. You have done a similar thing. You meet them and you talk about that activity, you have other things in common. It is all very pleasant. But it is not religious, you don't worship the sun or anything (laughs)

(Ian)

According to him these good feelings are present within energy communities because all participants have committed their lifestyle and had invested substantial sums of money to the project and this creates solidarity and commonality among all the participants regardless of religion or other convictions which was *'all very pleasant'*.

7.4: Struggling with the role of religion

7.4.1: Disappointment

This section of the chapter will address the second point of the chapter outline. It will discuss how environmentally concerned Christians feel about that their faith-based motivations are not being welcomed and that there seems to be little room for faith-based expression within secular environmental groups.

In the coming sections both the term faith and the term religion will be used. Both terms are very similar and many interviewees and participants used them interchangeable to a certain extent. Religion tends to be a more formal and distant word and is used when people talk about for example what Christianity can offer to the rest of society. Faith is more personal and is used when people discuss their personal motivations to be involved in secular groups. As such the word faith will be used when people discuss their own experiences within secular groups while the word religion will be used during a discussion (7.4.4) about why academics focus often so strongly on the 'institutional aspects' of religion as within those discussion religion/faith is used in a much more abstract and impersonal way.

As is clear from the examples in the previous section, many environmentally concerned Christians are quite happy with their current involvement in secular groups and have no intention of leaving the secular groups in which they are involved. However, because the collaborations are very much focused on the

practical aspects and shared concerns about the environment, their Christian faith plays little role in these collaborations, apart from being a private source of motivation. And this is seen as disappointing and sometimes even frustrating by many environmentally concerned Christians. These disappointments do not come from outright hostility or from the active exclusion of expressions of the Christian faith but they rather stem from a disinterest or an assumption that Christian faith isn't relevant or necessary within environmental groups. Many environmentally concerned Christians report how others in secular environmental organisations pay no or little interest to their Christian belief. For example, the earlier mentioned retired geography teacher told: *I can't say that many of the people that I work with have taken great interest in my faith* (David). He went on to say that: '*It's polite acceptance but not showing any particular interest in my beliefs'*. In a similar way an active member of Green Christian who takes a Green Christian banner to climate marches said *'that occasionally, you might get an odd responds from somebody who wants to know a bit but in the main it's fairly neutral'*… To which she added *'sadly'* (Georgie). She felt quite disappointed that other protesters took little interest in their explicitly Christian banner. According to her *'we're just a small fish in a big pond when you're going to those'* (climate marches) and she commented that the Christians present within those climate marches were seen as *'like everybody else who is there'* (Georgie). Another member of Green Christian who is active within the Transition Town movement but nowadays is involved in the leadership of Green Christian told how he felt that Christianity was seen as irrelevant:

I set up the Transition town movement where I live and I used to go to (national) meetings I think that there was really a feel that Christianity was a kind of… (thinking)..not relevant to the Transition movement.

(Adam)

His fellow participants within the Transition town movement were very well aware of his Christian background and *'they are fine with it but they are not really interested'*. But he also emphasised that this perceived lack of relevance and interest might also just be *'a perception in my head'* (Adam) and he also added that according to him there is interest in spirituality within the Transition Town movement. Another active member of Green Christian told how she felt that within secular environmental groups she was unable to express or use her Christian faith:

So many of the other organisations like Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth have Christians involved but there is no way of expressing that within the formats of those organisations.

(Lucy)

This inability to express her faith or use it in a way that could benefit the organisation led her away from the large environmental groups and she is currently very active in Green Christian. This feeling of being unable to express your Christian faith within the secular environmental movement is also shared by others who have experienced similar things. Thereby it is important to emphasise that this ignoring of their Christian faith is not necessarily done on purpose, but it may be done because non-Christian environmental activists just don't realise what the role and importance of that faith based motivations have for Christians. For example, the earlier mentioned female member of Green Christian who as involved in a community energy project said:

Yes, people would know that I'm involved with the church. But they probably wouldn't think that we are supporting the project because of our faith, they probably wouldn't think that. I don't think I have ever had a discussion. I don't think people will think that they help the project because of their Christian faith.

(Elisabeth)

However, the consequences of this lack of attention to faith-based motivations go beyond the fact that environmentally concerned Christians sometimes feel that their motivation is ignored or forgotten. Some do feel rather unhappy and uncomfortable by the inability to express their faith-based motivations within secular groups. This was mostly clearly shown by the earlier mentioned founder of a Transition town movement group. He told that he felt uncomfortable while being active within secular groups because his Christian identity was being left out.

I felt that I was sort of compartmentalising. My Christianity was inside when I was with Green people but with Christians they just weren't interested. It was an uncomfortable feeling, I didn't feel like a whole person.

(Adam)

As the quote above shows, he was finding it very difficult, if not impossible to work and collaborate with secular groups while not being able to express or use his Christian faith and an additional problem for him was that within his own church there was little attention for the environment (for the discussion about churches doing very little with the environment see previous chapter). But again, it was not that the secular participants actively banned religion but rather *'They just didn't speak about it… They weren't interested' (Adam).* As such he found himself caught between pro-environmental groups that ignored his Christian faith while his own faith community paid little attention to his concerns for the environment. In a very similar way the earlier mentioned active member of Green Christian who argued

that within large environmental groups *'there is no way of expressing'* (Lucy) faith commented about the difficulty of not being able to express her Christian faith within secular groups while also struggling at church: *'It's difficult, it's a very uncomfortable position to be in'* (Lucy). However, for the just mentioned former leader of the Transition Town initiative the situation improved dramatically after encountering Green Christian. At Green Christian he was able to express both his Christian faith and his environmental concern, and this really strengthened and enhanced his faith based environmental concern in way that was not possible for him before. Finding out about Green Christian and attending its meetings felt like coming home for him and now *'all of a sudden it was a jigsaw puzzle that fitted together'* (Adam). He explained how he wept after coming home from attending his first Green Christian retreat and how he now feels again *'like a whole person'*. Currently, for him Green Christian is his 'main environmental involvement'.

However, it is interesting to add that not all the environmentally concerned Christians had this experience and in particular one participant said that his experience was much better and the non-Christians he had during his involvements with secular environmental groups had been much better.

Even though they weren't Christians themselves they really wanted to encourage churches to get on board. They felt that their work was validated more if the churches were with them.

(Phil)

Apart from a few incidents, there are no real clashes between environmentally concerned Christians and other non-Christians. Most of the disappointment and frustration among environmentally concerned Christians comes from the fact that others within secular organisations do not realise the importance of their faith-based motivations and as such ignore their faith-based motivations and give them no space within the organisation. There are a small number of incidents whereby people explicitly object to the presence of Christianity but they are very rare. For example, a member of Green Christian told about the inability to express faith within Greenpeace or Friends of the Earth also mentioned an incident that happened while attending an event that sought to bring closer together environmental organisations and the labour unions.

I mentioned to somebody there that I was a Christian and he got up from the table and he walked away. And we had a really nice conversation up to that moment and he just couldn't handle it for whatever reason and avoided me for the rest of the conference.

(Lucy)

Another more explicit incident happened when a member of Green Christian stood as a candidate for the Green party in local elections and got into disagreement about same sex marriage with the Green party leadership as he couldn't endorse same sex marriage due to his Christian faith. The leadership wasn't happy with that but he strongly stated that *'my Christianity comes before my Green Party membership'* (Jonathan) He also stated that experience of being a Christian within the Green party wasn't so good.

D: How do people in the Green Party respond to your Christian background?
J: Not well
D: Not well?
J: They are usually not religious themselves. They just think I'm a bit of a weirdo (laughs). Let's face it, Christians are in the minority these days.

However, when asked whether *'he was still a happy member of the Green party?* He replied by saying: *Oh, yes* (Jonathan). So, despite his struggles he had no intention of leaving the Green party but he did struggle with the same sex marriage position of the Green party. It also interesting to note that another Green Christian member who was an active member of the 'Liberal Democrats' didn't experience any such more explicit disagreement and said that she could freely express herself as a Christian and certainly wasn't seen as a weirdo. She said that during conferences of the Liberal Democrats, members would go together to church. *'So, we're quite open about it' (Catherine)* she emphasised.

7.4.2: Not religion but specific issues

This section will continue to discuss how environmentally concerned Christians deal with the fact that there is little room for their Christian faith within secular groups. This section will go deeper in on the issue of secular groups preferring to collaborate on specific and clearly defined topics.

Not giving room to the faith-based motivations and instead keeping the focus on the shared concerns about specific environmental problems does give potentially problems. Through this problem specific approach there is indeed plenty of common ground between the various believers and non-believers on the seriousness of the environmental issues in question and the needed political, technological, societal and economical solutions. However, these common grounds are only formed on specific grounds and around specific issues as also the earlier mentioned retired geography teacher argues:

Yeah, It's just a case of working together to campaign on a particular issue. It's the issue that is central; it's not the reasons why we come. It's just getting on with winning the issue.

(David)

As such quote above also argues, collaborations on specific issues and concerns can be very successful and are able to bring together a diversity of people from faith and non-faith backgrounds. As is also clearly evidenced by the fact that environmentally concerned Christians are involved in a very wide range of organisations and have no interest in leaving these groups. But only working together on specific shared concerns and issues rather than having some sort of a broader goal or aim does make these collaborations look rather vulnerable when disagreement about these specific concerns erupts or when long term future decisions need to be taken. In the end collaborations which are solely based on specific shared concerns and perhaps a shared political ideology might not provide the long term, stable partnerships that addressing issues like climate change or bio-diversity loss need. They are in fact a bit like how the retired geography teacher described his relationship with others with the secular groups in which he is active: *Maybe I'm a little bit odd but nice enough chap and just get on with whatever we're doing*. (David) Being 'nice enough' isn't really something that inspires much confidence in the long-term viability of collaborations on environmental issues. Working together on specific shared environmental concerns also undermines the desire *'To offer Christian insights to the Green movement'* as Green Christian explicitly states in its vision statement. In fact, one active member of Green Christian remarked quite cynically that *'At the beginning (when Green Christian was founded) the idea was that Christians could feed into the green/environmental movement. But we're still waiting for that to happen'* (Lucy). Nor does only focusing on specific shared environmental concerns seem to treat religious reason as having valuable insights to debates which will enrich and enable discussions and that will allow religion to become an inspiring energy for all as Habermas (2006, p17) puts it. The complementary learning process that should take place between those with faith backgrounds and those without faith, as Habermas argues, doesn't seem to be taking place. While environmentally concerned Christians are actively embracing many of the ideological positions and scientific arguments of the wider green movement this is not reciprocated, and the Christian faith is not seen as having relevance for those from non-Christian backgrounds.

7.4.3: Why is there so little interest in religion?

The next section of this chapter will still focus on the second point of the chapter outline. It will continue to work on why secular environmental groups don't seem to give much room to faith-based motivations. To do this, the section will use the

interviews with secular environmental organisations from the Exeter area and also use the many writings from academics about why we should collaborate and give space to faith-based ideas and faith-based organisations when addressing environmental problems (as discussed in the second chapter of this thesis).

The two secular groups that are used for this purpose are involved in community energy projects and the Transition town movement. The goals of these secular groups are, as they described it themselves, *'to strengthen local communities and to help these communities to transfer towards a low carbon society and to help them address climate change'*. Within the organisations I spoke with the (former) leadership. Although both these groups are secular and not have any relations with churches or other religious institutions and don't receive any financial support from them, they have actively tried to involve local churches in their work. The reason why they wanted to involve churches in their work was according to both the organisations because *'are an important part of the community'* (Pete) and therefore their participation was seen as desirable. On several occasions the interviewees from both the organisations emphasised the important role of churches and how their perceived importance within the community was the reason to approach them:

I think it would help us because churches are an important part of the community with lots of people involved with them, although a minority now. So, it would help us. It would be another way of getting our message out. And it would help them as well really.

(Pete)

All the time we try to get different organisations in (place name) to take this on because it is something important and the churches are an important part of the community. We hope to promote our own.

(Pete)

I mean, I was making contact with any links that could tell me about community buildings and community organisations and the church was obviously going to be one of the ones that I was investigating

(Georgie)

We approached all owners of community-oriented buildings and that had a community base to their existence.

(Georgie)

As the quotes above show churches were approached because they were seen as an important part of the community. With their central and also visible position within society there were seen as an important group to get on board. As such the churches are seen and approached in the same way as schools, community centres or sports centres. However, churches have of course a very different role than other community groups and are also perceived very differently by people and will to a certain extent attract a different type of public. Because churches are approached as being little or no different than other community organisations the faith aspect of churches didn't seem to play a role. The former board member of energy community charity, who had also been involved in a local Transition town initiative, argued that according to her in both these organisations religion didn't play a role because people came together on shared concerns about the environment.

I don't think that people are open about their religious beliefs. It just doesn't come up. It's not something that people shout about. If you're having a meeting about the environment, whether you're religious or not part of the conversation. It's not so much that people aren't open to it just felt that wasn't appropriate for that.

(Georgie)

For her the emphasis was on the environment and the things that needed to be done to address environmental problems. It was about addressing climate change, renewable energy, solar panels and lobbying for political action rather than the Christian faith or any faith for that matter. For her discussing religion in such a setting isn't appropriate and as such shouldn't be part of this kind of collaboration. It has to be added that she wasn't an atheist but rather someone who has *'a spiritual practice'* (Georgie) but doesn't belong to any organised religion as she put it herself. The organisation in which she was involved did manage to convince one church to put solar panels on their building and when asked why this church participated she commented that:

Well, it made sense to them. They wanted to do something that was environmentally sound. They wanted to save carbon. I mean each of our installations requires one person within the organisation to want it to happen. We had one person in the early days based at the university that pushed for it to happen at (Name church). He later got ill and stepped out but somebody took over and helped to get it through.

(Georgie)

Although, it is absolutely true that an important incentive to get involved in such projects is to reduce emissions or other more scientific considerations as well as saving money on the heating bill and it is also true that there are always a few key figures within organisations that are important to make the project a success. But a church is very different from other organisations and although their motivations might be strongly based on financial incentives or scientific facts, a sentence like *'They wanted to do something that was environmentally sound'* might have a profound theological aspect to it which might not be immediately evident from the outside but which might very well be an important motivator for the church to participate. Although, I haven't talked with leaders of the churches in question, it is highly unlikely that they had no theological motivations to put solar panels on their roof. Because in the past this church has been a venue for conferences about the church and the environment and church members have spoken to people from other churches about their experience and motivation of getting solar panels on their church roof.

So, as demonstrated above, churches were approached by these secular environmental groups due to their important role in the community and because of their important role within the community they were seen desirable include in their project. However, the faith aspect of the churches is being left out even though faith-based motivations might very well be an important motivator of many churches to be involved in such projects in the first place.

7.4.4: Focus on institutional aspects of religion

The following section will still focus on the second point of the chapter outline but it will be more theoretical and focus on the strong emphasis on the societal roles of religion rather than faith or theology in its own right. This focus on the societal roles of religion as found in many of the writings which favour the inclusion of religious groups in relation to addressing environmental problems (for these writings see also chapter two). For example, according to the World Bank the reason why governments and environmental NGO's should collaborate with religious institutions on environmental issues is because:

The faiths have a wider network on the ground than any other element of civil society. They also have centuries of experience, and in many places provide a substantial part of the educational, medical, and welfare structures and personnel in the country. They also often have larger followings than many political parties, across much wider social ranges. The faiths actually are the oldest, largest, most respected, and deepest-penetrating NGOs.

(World Bank 2006, p1)

The World Bank strongly emphasises the institutional aspects of religion but doesn't mention that the institutional aspects of religion are formed by theological and ethical beliefs on which all this influence and power rests. As already written in chapter two, many academics, activists and media also strongly favour the involvement of religion by emphasising that the vast majority of the world population belongs to a religion or that religious institutions have always been very powerful agents of change on issues like slavery or in the civil rights movement and that for this reason religions should be incorporated or that partnerships between environmental groups and religious institutions. As such religion is seen as something which *'can render greater public legitimacy and provide capability to mobilize mass support for biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation'* (Bhagwat et al 2011, p234). Many also emphasise that religious institutions can generate lots of social capital and that believers are well-known to give lots of time and money to charity and volunteering and there are also some writings that argue that religious teachings are unique, but many writings emphasise when talking about religious teachings that they can be used to bring more believers into the environmental movement rather than secular groups learning something from religious teachings:

They can seek to persuade their members that each individual has a moral obligation to contribute in some way to conservation, and can provide guidance on how to pursue environmental management objectives.

(World Bank 2006, p2)

These writings strongly focus on the institutional aspects of religion and don't seem to engage much with questions like, why are giving religious people so much money to charities? Or why did religious institutions support the abolition of slavery? Or why are so many churches welcoming refugees? The answer to such questions is that believers feel that their faith tells them to do so. They have a strong theological drive to help others, to build hospitals or to set up foodbanks. The institutional networks of religions come out of a strong theological belief that building hospitals or helping refugees, caring for creation or helping the homeless is an essential part of their faith. As such it is not possible to gain access to such faith-based networks or to integrate such ethics into secular movements without giving space to the underlying theological convictions. Such theological convictions are the reason that churches have built hospitals and why so many churches are running soup kitchens and therefore cannot be ignored, forgotten and translated into something secular. Environmentally concerned Christians also have such strong theological convictions about protecting the environment. They see protecting the environment and addressing environmental problems like climate change, air pollution or bio-diversity loss as things that their faith tells them to address. Of course, science and political ideology play an important role as

explained in the previous chapter there is also a strong faith component that tells them to go out and care and protect God's Creation. Ignoring or downplaying such faith-based motivations can have serious consequences. As already described earlier in this chapter, environmentally concerned Christians were disappointed by the lack of attention to their faith-based motivations and some left secular groups and described how they felt that they had to compartmentalise their faith from their actual concern for the environment. Wanting to incorporate the institutional aspects of religion without the underlying beliefs and theology is not possible and will cause the participants who hold such faith-based beliefs to become disappointed and potentially leave the organisation all together or they will have to separate their faith from their environmental concern which for many is impossible.

As such, the strong focus on the institutional aspects of religion and forgetting about the deep theological convictions on which these institutions are founded causes environmentally concerned Christians to feel disappointed and unable to express their faith-based motivations while it makes secular groups focus on the important position of churches within communities without looking at the underlying theological motivations. This forgetting of the underlying theology is quite a serious problem as it forces environmentally concerned Christians hide or compartmentalise their faith and this causes, as outlined earlier in the chapter, quite a lot of disappointment and stress and some environmentally concerned Christians are nowadays not as active in secular groups as they used to be. As such it causes two problems which are both problematic for the concept of postsecularity and the concept of postsecular rapprochement. Firstly, as shown earlier in the chapter, ignoring or labelling religion as 'not appropriate' does place a substantial burden on the shoulders of believers. Their faith-based motivations are forgotten, ignored or labelled 'not appropriate' and this means that their deep and important convictions and motivations are forgotten or not welcome within secular groups and this causes much stress and disappointment. As such the exclusion and the ignoring of his faith-based motivation put a considerable amount of psychological burden on his shoulders. Putting the burden of the exclusion of religion on the shoulders of believers is strongly opposed by Habermas (see Habermas 2006; Habermas 2008b) and he stresses that both religious and secular citizens need to share this burden, rather than religious citizens alone.

However, this doesn't seem to happen according to participants in this thesis. As such there was no burden sharing and believers stand alone in their attempts to deal with the consequences of this exclusion of their faith. Secondly, Habermas and also Cloke & Beaumont (2012) also strongly emphasise the need for a *'complementary learning process for both religious and secular citizens'* (Habermas 2010a p21) or a *'reflexive transformation of secular and faith-based mentalities'* as Cloke & Beaumont (2012, p36) describe it. People should learn

from each other's prospective and religious and secular citizens should speak with the other and not merely about one other according to Habermas (2010a, p16).

From the limited scope of this thesis, which strongly relied on the experiences of a group of environmentally concerned Christians and some in-depth interviews with secular groups and analysis of writings by academics, there seems little attention for religion beyond the institutional networks of religious institutions and the common ground around specific issues like solar panels on roofs or opposition to fracking but such very specific common grounds seem to leave out opportunities to learn and incorporate any ideas, perspectives or arguments that come from faith-based sources. As such, environmentally concerned Christians use lots of 'secular' arguments about climate change, air pollution or the need for political change in their arguments and actions, often more than they use faith-based arguments, but in the context of secular environmental groups the faith-based motivations of environmentally concerned Christians never become more than a private source of motivation for believers. While environmentally concerned Christians are actively embracing many of the positions and arguments of the green movement this is not reciprocated, and the Christian faith is not seen as having relevance for those from non-Christian backgrounds. Whereas other studies on urban faith-based organisations and postsecularity have found that secular groups and faith-based organisations are able to establish common grounds that are more than just pragmatism and short term benefits and that within such 'postsecular partnerships' Christian ethics such as agape and caritas are used to encourage an unconditional love for people in need (see Cloke & Beaumont 2012; Cloke et al 2013; May & Cloke 2014; Williams 2015). However, within the context of environmental action the Christian faith is not deemed relevant because the focus is on very specific issues like stopping fracking, banning diesel cars or applying for a grant to put solar panels on roofs. Underlying religious or philosophical drivers are motivating people but remain mostly hidden from eye sight and are not being used to motivate the wider organisation as has been the case with the Christian ethics of agape and caritas.

In her research Nita (2014;2016) writes how religious climate activists are being marginalised within the environmental movements because they were viewed as 'being too religious to be green' while they also faced disapproval from fellow Christians and fellow Muslims about their environmental involvement, they were viewed as 'too green' to be Christian or Muslim. She argues that religious climate activists have to make 'cultural commutes' between their environmentally concerned but not in religion interested fellow activists and their fellow churchgoers who are religious but show little interest in the environment. Although, this is certainly partly true and for some it feels like they don't really fit properly into either group. But rather than feeling more like aliens, the local church is more seen as a

place where there is still lots to be gained. It's seen more as a challenge. The struggles in the church, are as explained in previous chapters have not to do with theology but rather with indifference and resistance to environmental issues, unfamiliarity with the issue and the decline of institutionalised Christianity and as such many environmentally concerned Christians just try slowly by living as an example for others and by just doing little more pragmatically oriented things like bringing local food to a church lunch or growing flowers in the churchyard to try to make people think about the importance of the environment. On the other hand, about their fellow secular participants and activists they seem more disappointed. With these people, environmentally concerned Christians share their concerns about the environment and their willingness to undertake action and make drastic changes to their lifestyle. But despite all these commonalities they don't see or won't give and space to the faith-based motivations of environmentally concerned Christians. And this can be really frustration as they have so much in common. Their fellow churchgoers must make entire lifestyle 'green' and for example no longer drive a car, go on holidays locally or stop eating fruit that is out of season and although they are often not interested or too busy to get involved in anything related to the environment, there are small successes and progress is slowly being made. However, their fellow activists and participants don't have to make such radical changes and only have to give some space to the faith-based concerns of environmentally concerned Christians and let these faith-based motivations and concern add any value that they might have to their collaboration. Environmentally concerned Christians feel like they have a valuable perspective that is not just valuable to themselves but also for others and they should make alliances that go beyond 'being nice enough'. Because as an active member of Green Christian argues:

'It is important to develop…. a more powerful fusion of what environmental sustainability actually should be between people of all faiths and none……. The Muslims, the Jews and Hindus and with people from…. some secular organisations. It helps people in the wider society.'

(Phil)

However, this making of wide interfaith alliances is seen as 'not appropriate' or is just forgotten and that disappoints by some in the secular green movement and this frustrates many environmentally concerned Christians because the secular environmental movement should know better.

7.5: What role can faith play in secular environmental groups?

This section will focus on the third point of the chapter outline. It will discuss what the role of religion within secular environmental groups should be.

As outlined in the previous sections, environmentally concerned Christians often struggle to give their faith a place within secular environmental groups. They feel what their faith-based motivations aren't taken serious and not seen as relevant for the organisation. This leaves environmentally concerned Christians disappointed and they also feel like they need to split their environmental concern from their faith in order to fully participate even though their faith is central to their environmental concern. I think that religion should not be restrained within secular environmental groups for several reasons. Firstly, for many environmentally concerned Christians faith and environmental concern are deeply related are cannot simply be separated as might seem needed within secular environmental groups. For example, the earlier mentioned retired Anglican priest argues:

Faith is not something in a little box on its own. It's all integral to who I am and how I behave

(Robert)

Another supporter of Green Christian, said how her motivation to get involved in addressing environmental problems:

…..comes very much from within, from feeling very strongly that this earth is a wonderful creation. It's something that we are part of but we are dependent of the environment and we are part of the environment.

(Jenny)

The earlier mentioned member who said that he felt that he had to compartmentalise his faith, said about the connect between faith and environmental concern:

I think they are inseparable. It's difficult to disentangle and I don't think we should try. We are meant to be God's representatives on earth. We are meant to look after the planet. We are meant to look after all the species and I don't think that I can separate the Christian bit at all.

(Adam)

So, expecting people to separate their faith-based motivations from their environmental concern is not possible. It is asking people to leave their deepest and most sincere convictions outside. Of course, environmentally concerned Christians also accept climate science and often share the same political ideology but without their faith they don't feel *'a whole person'* anymore. It will cause substantial destress among some environmentally concerned Christians. Making the exclusion of religion into a burden for believers is also opposed by Habermas as the exclusion of religion should never become *'undue mental and psychological burden for those of its citizens who follow a faith'* (2006 p9). If people are interested

and willing to learn something from faith-based arguments (a complementary learning process as Habermas calls it) then it might have been less problematic (although still problematic as explained in the theoretical postsecularity chapter) but this doesn't really seem to happen and religion is only treated as a personal motivator with a prominent role in society and making it more visible in secular environmental groups is seen as 'not appropriate'. As such believers are left to their own devises and this makes them sad and disappointed. Secondly, stopping faith-based motivations from becoming widely shared motivations will also exclude opportunities to learn from faith-based teachings or ethics. For example, the concept of stewardship is a really useful tool to cross political divides as will be explained a little later in this chapter. However, based on the research for this thesis there seems little interest in learning from faith-based ideas. Lastly, environmentally concerned Christians have no intention to convert people or make their faith the rule of the organisation. All environmentally concerned Christians make it very clear that they join secular environmental groups first and foremost because they want to address environmental problems. Fear of some sort of a religious takeover is unfounded. For example, a retired Methodist preacher commented: *'I don't see every conversation as an opportunity to push the Christian faith on people'* (Harry) while another member of Green Christian added that she preferred to work *'by example not by word'* (Catherine) and the member who felt that he was compartmentalising his faith said: *'I haven't joined them in order to make them Christians'* (Adam) An active member of Green Christian who had been organising many Green Christian events summarised the attitude very well by saying:

To reach out to Christian churches with an environmental message and reach out to the secular green movement with the Christian message not is a proselytising form but saying 'we are with you' and we contribute.

(Hannah)

A supporter of Green Christian who led a community garden initiative told about how his faith was a very important aspect of his life and how it encouraged him to be involved in the community garden initiative but he also emphasised:

'I'm going there for the garden. But if somebody starts talking about spiritual things then I'm happy to tell them what I think but I'm not going there to evangelise. I'm going there because I feel that I should be going'

(Tom)

So, although environmentally concerned Christians deeply care about their Christian faith and feel motivated by it they have no intention to forcefully share their faith with others. However, this does not mean that their faith can just be ignored or left out. Ignoring religion is something very different from not seeking to actively convert someone. Conversion and fearing that believers might try to take

control don't seem to be based on reality but environmentally concerned Christians do want their faith to be taken seriously and not just been treated as some sort of private motivation. Environmentally concerned Christians want to be seen as Christian and be able to express this and not just be seen as another volunteer with a different motivation. They want to be able to say *'we are with you' and we contribute'* and although they don't want to convert non-Christians they certainly would like to share Christian insights with others so that it might also benefit others as well. Just as with Habermas and other philosophers there seems to be some kind of an assumption that believers are always seeking to convert others and extend the influence of their faith (see also theoretical postsecularity chapter) but this isn't true as many environmentally concerned Christians demonstrate. Environmentally concerned Christians don't want to be ignored or feel excluded based on assumptions that don't reflect how they practice their faith.

The 'problem' at the moment is that both environmentally concerned Christians and other non-Christians are very pragmatic and practical about the grounds on which they collaborate. Needs are very practical and short term such as raising money for solar panels or opposing a fracking permit and as such there has been little attention to the underlying motivations of participants. However, with more long-term issues, which is most clearly visible in the issue of climate change, a much more long-term and more durable platform to collaborate needs to be established between all the participants. Providing long term incentives which enable people to care and remain committed are needed. This stimulating of long-term commitment is something in which the Christian faith could help according to some.

The Green movement has been very successful at dealing with very specific and technical issues. Ozone layer depletion, it has been quite successful at that. It has not been successful at the big defuse areas like climate and biodiversity loss. We got to find out what works…. So, I'm working with Green Christian, I'm working with others to try and engage…… to find something that…..

(Phil)

The quote above seems to reflect something that has frequently been coming out of studies on faith-based environmental groups, namely, that faith-based groups are especially suited for more long term, slower and incremental change within the wider society while secular environmental groups are focused and specialised in pursuing specific policy goals or championing specific causes (Feldman & Moseley 2003; Smith & Pulver 2008; Kidwell et al 2018). Such descriptions make secular groups look like rather short term minded and without long term plans and these studies also remain rather vague on what such commitments to long term change might look like in practice but what is clear is that environmental problems cannot be solved by short term policy goals alone and that durable and long-term commitments and partnerships are needed. The Christian faith might very well be able to provide incentives which enable such long-term commitment to

environmental issues. For example, creation care is very much long term focused as it is an ongoing motivation to protect the environment against harm whether that is climate change, air pollution or pesticides. But whether it can be adjusted and used by non-Christians as well remains debatable. There is no clear cut solution but I think that allowing Christians and other believers to freely bring in their faith and let their ideas about for example stewardship be beneficial for the entire organisation (for the usage and benefits of stewardship see next section) rather than being treated as a potential threat and be put away in the private sphere because faith is force for good that has teachings which can benefit anyone.

7.6: Stewardship

7.6.1: Stewardship and responsibility

The following section will go deeper in on the question about which Christian values are able to cross the religious secular/divide. It focuses on the fourth and final point of the chapter outline.

Christian ideas about the environment remain very marginal and do not extent there influence into non-Christian reasoning about the environment and in most cases it is Christians who incorporate Christian eco-theology into scientific, political and economic arguments about the environment and combined these arguments will hopefully convince their fellow believers of the need of urgent action. However, there is one important exception. This exception is the concept of stewardship. Although the concept of stewardship isn't directly mentioned it the bible it is a very well-known concept that has its origins in Christian theology. However, unlike other eco-theological concepts, stewardship has been applied in many areas outside theology and is especially popular in the areas of conservation biology and sustainability (Worrell & Appleby 2000; Terborgh 2000; Nassauer 2011; Chaplin III et al 2009; Bennett et al 2018; Enquist et al 2018; Mathevet et al 2018; West et al 2018). An often cited (secular) definition of stewardship is the one given by Worrell & Appleby (2000):

Stewardship is the responsible use (including conservation) of natural resources in a way that takes full and balanced account of the interests of society, future generations, and other species, as well as of private needs, and accepts significant answerability to society.

(p263)

Within stewardship the idea of 'responsible use' is central. This idea of 'responsible use', aims to create a situation in which using a product, good or service is done in a way that it still benefits humans while not depleting or exhausting the natural

world or burden the rest of society so that future generations will also be able to use and benefit from the product, good or service. This idea of improving the usage rather than banning or replacing of a particular service, good or product has been very popular. From the stewardship prospective, humans are depicted as stewards who can still eat meat, drive cars, use pesticides or buy tropical hardwood but they need to be modest and restrain themselves and keep monitoring the impact of their consumption. This idea has been applied in many fields. A well-known and highly visible application of stewardship are the labelling efforts through the Marine and Forestry Stewardship councils which seek to enable customers to buy sustainable sourced wood products and fish. The aim is that through these labelling initiatives people will be able to responsibly use wood products and eat fish. The goal is not to reduce consumption but rather to enable consumers to act responsibly by giving them sustainable options. Although, these steward council efforts are praised by some studies (Gutierrez et al 2012; Martin et al 2012; Heilmayr & Lambin 2016) they are certainly not without problems and have also been criticised having little effect (see Blackman et al 2018; Marx & Cuypers 2010; Dingwerth 2008; Carvalho et al 2015; Jacquet & Pauly 2008; Khaksar et al 2015; Miller et al 2012). But despite these shortcomings they do allow individual consumers to make their personal sustainable choices.

7.6.2: Anti-microbial Stewardship

Another area where stewardship is very popular is medicine. Within medicine the issue of antibiotic resistance is a major problem (Robinson et al 2016; Marston et al 2016; Llor & Bjerrum 2014; Van Boeckel et al 2014; Laxminarayan et al 2013) and in order to stop the growing use of anti-biotics many have to looking at the concept of stewardship for help. Within medicine stewardship is extensively used as way to reduce the usage of anti-biotics and commonly known as ‘Antibiotic or anti-microbial Stewardship’ (Owens 2008; Allerberger et al 2009; Ashiru-Oredope et al 2012; Barlam et al 2016; Dryden et al 2009; Pulcini & Gyssens 2013; Aryee & Price 2014). Doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other medical personnel are seen as stewards who to need to be prescribing and administering anti-biotics responsibly and prevent unnecessary use of anti-biotics. Many hospitals around the world have nowadays so called anti-biotic stewardship programs and such programs have proven to be useful ways to reduce the usage and intake of anti-biotics (Aldeyab et al 2012; Di Pentima et al 2011; Dryden et al 2012; Brink et al 2016; Schuts et al 2016; Baur et al 2017; Karanika et al 2016). The goal of such programs is not to ban the use of anti-biotics (that would be suicidal) or replace them with another novel approach but rather to promote ‘responsible use’ of anti-biotics and train medical staff in the ways how to reduce anti-biotics usage without compromising health care or the effectiveness of anti-biotics in the future. Anti-biotics stewardship is done by medical staff rather than the wider society and as

such, also within the field of medicine the concept of stewardship is used to emphasise responsible use.

7.6.3: The Stewardship Code

Within law (not just environmental law) the concept of stewardship is also frequently used. A well-known example is the UK stewardship code[48]. This code encourages institutional investors (pension funds, insurance companies, banks and hedge funds) to act as stewards over the money that people (so called investees) have entrusted to these institutional investors and that they have to act responsible and put the interests of their investees first and thereby reducing long term risks for them (Reisberg 2011; Butler & Wong 2011; Roach 2011; Chiu 2012; Arsalidou 2012). Within such a context:

Stewardship has been defined as the process through which shareholders, directors and others seek to influence companies in the direction of long term, sustainable performance that derives from contributing to human progress and the wellbeing of the environment and society

(Reisberg 2011, p126)

The stewardship code was first launched after the financial crisis in an attempt to prevent a similar scenario from happening again. The idea was that from now on company boards should focus on the benefits of the people that had invested their money into them rather than going for risky and short-term profit and instead go for long term durable, less risky and sustainable profits. To achieve this, institutional investors should hold companies account and make sure that the companies in which they invest aim for long term durability and sustainability with minimal risk instead of risky and unsustainable short term profits. The stewardship code contains 7 rules which should enable both investors and company boards to focus on long term durability and sustainability. Again, the importance is that stewardship is linked with responsible use. It is not forbidden for companies, pension funds or banks to try to make more money on the stock exchange and in such a sense they are still allowed to take risks with the money that people have given to them but they have be responsible and don't take too much risk and instead be good stewards and focus on long term durability and sustainability. It is of course, far from easy to encourage such a shift in outlook among institutional investors and some have argued that the stewardship code needs to be drastically reworked because as for now it has little effect (Reisberg 2015; Cheffins 2010; Wong 2015) although others are more positive (Lu et al 2018).

[48] See https://www.frc.org.uk/getattachment/d67933f9-ca38-4233-b603-3d24b2f62c5f/UK-Stewardship-Code-(September-2012).pdf Last accessed 4 December 2018

7.6.4: Stewardship as a management theory

Stewardship as a concept is also a well-known management theory that was developed as an alternative to the agency theory. The agency theory argues what within many firms there is separation of ownership and control in the sense that those who are involved in the daily running of a company and those who are responsible for making decisions are employees (called agents in management literature) and not the owners (called principles in management literature) (Fama & Jensen 1983). However, the interests and concerns of the principles and those of the agents don't align all the time and conflicts of interest will occur. For short, managers, directors and other who are involved running the company are self-serving and more interested in their own benefit than that of the owners and that therefore owners/shareholders need to put into place various devices that will entice the agents to work for them (Ross 1973; Jensen & Meckling 1976; Eisenhardt 1989). However, others have expressed their doubts about this analysis and argue that agents are much more than just seekers for the best personal outcome (Demsetz & Lehn 1985; Eddleston et al 2012; Cuevas-Rodríguez et al 2012). The stewardship theory rejects that agents in firms are acting in a self-serving way but rather holds that agents want to be good stewards and will act in the best interest of the principles (Donaldson & Davis 1991; Davis et al 1997; Hernandez 2012). As such:

In stewardship theory, the model of man is based on a steward whose behavior is ordered such that pro- organizational, collectivistic behaviors have higher utility than individualistic, self-serving behaviors. Given a choice between self-serving behavior and pro-organizational behavior, a steward's behavior will not depart from the interests of his or her organization. A steward will not substitute or trade self-serving behaviors for cooperative behaviors.

Davis et al (1997,p24)

From the quote above it is clear than within the context of management stewardship is seen as behaviour that puts the well-being of the company first rather than personal benefit. A good steward is a responsible person who uses his position and influence for the whole company rather than his personal benefit. Like the previous usages of stewardship, the theory of stewardship within the context of management doesn't promote a radical new way of leading a company but it rather emphasises the aspect of acting responsibly and considering the needs of the company first rather than your own. Being a good and responsible manager means stewarding whole companying and helping it flourish.

7.6.5: Product Stewardship

Another well-known application of stewardship is through the idea of 'product stewardship'. The idea of product stewardship, which is frequently also called 'extended producer responsibility', entails that producers of goods like mobile phones, shampoo or cars have a duty to insure that the impact of their products throughout their entire lifespan on the environment and human health will be kept at a minimum (Weinberg 1999; Braglia & Petroni 2000; Scheijgrond 2011; Bhupendra & Sangle 2017).

Product stewardship and extended producer responsibility are policy approaches applied around the world and in the United States with the purpose of requiring or encouraging producer companies to reduce the negative environmental and societal impacts of their products throughout the products life cycle.

Monroe (2014, p223)

As such product stewardship extends the responsibilities for a producer beyond the function for which the product is primarily intended, like bringing you from A to B for a car manufacturer or providing you with a lunch as is case of a sandwich maker. Instead, product stewardship also includes responsibility for things like the leftover packaging after consumption or the toxins that are being released during demolition. Nowadays some countries have started to turn product stewardship into law, this is for example the case in Australia and the American state of Maine[49], and although such an extension of responsibilities for companies does put a lot of additional responsibilities of companies many companies have taken the idea of product stewardship on board. Companies like Coca Cola, Walmart, Bayer, Dow, Dupont, Heinz, IBM and Pfeizer all have special webpages dedicated to product stewardship which explain to the public how they seek to minimise the impact of their products on the environment and human health. Also oil companies like Shell and Exxon Mobile or coal mining companies like Peabody Energy and BHP all have product stewardship websites which describe how they make sure that their products and extraction activities are done in the most sustainable way and how these companies are giving lots of things back to their local communities in return.

7.6.6: Stewardship as not being enough

Like the previous usages of stewardship, it is clear that the concept of product stewardship doesn't mean radical change or doing something completely different. Shell and Exxon Mobile are still allowed to drill for oil in Nigeria or the Arctic but now they have to do it responsible and keep the negative side effects to a

[49] Australia: https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2011A00076 and Maine: http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/38/title38ch18sec0.html (Last accessed 4 December 2018)

minimum. As such product stewardship doesn't promote new or innovative ways of producing goods or services but it rather seeks to optimise existing approaches. In fact, many people will say that Shell, Exxon Mobile, the coal mining companies or any other company for that matter are just trying to green wash their activities by using the concept of stewardship. The emphasise on taking responsibility, being a good steward and making improvements to the existing framework rather than implementing drastic change does make it an easy target for much criticism which argues that stewardship as a concept has failed because it doesn't challenge the status quo and should therefore be replaced with more radical concepts. Some have tried to defend the concept of stewardship (see Welchman 2012 and Lane & Watson 2012 for a defence of product stewardship) but many people want to replace stewardship with something more radical and less anthropocentric. Many scholars, including theologians have already for a long time been stepping away from stewardship towards more bio-centric approaches (see for example Stone 1972; Naess 1973; Devall 1980; Taylor 1983; Santmire 2006; Palmer 2006; Lovelock 2006; Sponsel 2012; Kopnina et al 2018) and some have also argued that the concept of stewardship has become too 'polluted' by right wing politics that have tried to use the concept as a tool to oppose environmental action (Santmire 2010). It also seems almost certain that some critical human geographers will be able to argue that the idea of being a responsible steward is merely co-opting in some sort of move that is seeking to neo-liberalise nature due to the fact that the 'responsible attitude' of stewardship never challenges or criticises underlying assumptions but instead tells people to just do their jobs well and allows Shell or Peabody Energy to use the concept to green wash their activities and continue their activities like before (for the literature on the neoliberalising of nature see Bakker 2010; Castree 2008a; Castree 2008b). Lastly, stewardship also seems highly individualised with little attention to the wider societal implications. People are urged to be responsible, work hard at their job, buy sustainably sourced fish and don't prescribe too much anti-biotics but all these things are very much things individuals are supposed to do while the society as a whole, from which people learn these unsustainable behaviours, doesn't seem required to act more responsibly. As such, the concept of stewardship is also vulnerable for all the criticism against the strong focus on addressing environmental problems through individual behavioural change and especially consumption (for these criticisms for the introduction to this thesis). Just like nudging or social marketing also stewardship is very much concerned with making the individual behave responsible rather than society.

7.6.7: Stewardship as crossing political divides

However, the concept of stewardship has one major advantage over all the other approaches that try to make people interested and concerned about the environment. I think it is safe to say that stewardship is the only environmental

concept that is used by chemical and oil firms and right wing think tanks and environmental organisations and left-wing activists and right wing think tanks at the same time. The concept of stewardship is the only concept that has been able to bridge the deep political divide that cuts across society and additionally it is also the only concept that is able to cross the secular/religious divide. Many approaches and concepts which are aimed at making people feel connected and responsible to the environment have always only made impact in a small circle of academics, left wing activists and other left leaning intellectuals but those concepts have never made into the wider society and have never become part of societal debates, discussions or any sort of governmental policy. For example, the idea of economic degrowth is popular within academic circles but outside academia it remains a niche concept that struggles to gain traction outside dedicated environmental groups[50]. Economic growth, growing consumption and rising purchasing power are still central pillars under any policy for all the nations around the world and it will need a lot of political will power to change that. Stewardship on the other hand seems to do much better. Stewardship codes, as discussed earlier have already been implemented in 9 countries[51] (Wong 2015) and have become part of a legal framework. The idea of product stewardship has as already noted also been turned into law in Australia and the US state of Maine. Interesting is that both Australia and Maine and not know as places that have sustainability high on their agenda but that they both have passed laws that require producers take responsible for the entire life cycle of their product, including its impact on the environment. It is also very interesting to see that although the Donald Trump administration has rolled back many environmental regulations back it has kept a program called 'Conservation Stewardship Program'[52]. This program is run by the US Department of Agriculture and provides money for farmers to develop conservation efforts on their lands. Similarly, Republican states like Tennessee[53], Idaho[54] and Missouri[55] all run programs under the banner of stewardship that enable farmers but also others get involved in water, wildlife and soil conservation. At the moment of writing there is no indication that these programs will be axed soon. So, although these states have often little sympathy for climate change they seem very willing to get involved in environmental issues under the banner of stewardship. The state of

[50] Many academic articles about degrowth are published in the 'Journal of Cleaner Product' and 'Ecological Economics'. Both these journals are published by Elsevier and require expensive subscription fees or very high publication fees if you want to publish open access. As such by writing and publishing these articles academics make it possible for Elsevier to do the exact thing that they oppose so much.

[51] These countries are UK, the Netherlands, Japan, South Africa, Canada, Switzerland, Italy, Malaysia and Hong Kong.

[52] See https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/financial/csp/ Last accessed 4 December 2018

[53] See https://www.tn.gov/agriculture/farms/conservation.html Last accessed 4 December 2018

[54] See https://www.idl.idaho.gov/forestry/service/benefits-ifsp_11-2016.pdf Last accessed 4 December 2018

[55] See https://agriculture.mo.gov/news/newsitem/uuid/1107d01a-82ca-4a78-a069-11172e12d709 Last accessed 4 December 2018

Iowa even calls its department of agriculture, the *'Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship'* rather than just agriculture[56]. On top is this all is President Donald Trump quoted on the website of US department of the interior as saying *'We have to be great stewards of this land. This is magnificent land[57].* President Donald Trump originally made these comments during an interview with the magazine Field & Stream in January 2016 when he was still running for president. In the interview he was asked whether he would give federal land back to state and local governments. He replied by saying:

'I don't like the idea (transferring land back to state and local government) because I want to keep the lands great, and you don't know what the state is going to do. I mean, are they going to sell if they get into a little bit of trouble? And I don't think it's something that should be sold. We have to be great stewards of this land. This is magnificent land. And we have to be great stewards of this land'[58].

President Donald Trump (2016)

From the quote above it is clear that President Donald Trump opposes transferring federal land to state and local governments. Interestingly however, his opposition to transferring federal land to state and local governments is shared by many environmental groups who normally have very little in common with him. Of course, the words of Donald Trump might seem rather hollow when looking at his other environmental policies, but it is very interesting to note how politically conservative states and politicians are taking up similar positions to environmental groups and are willing to get involved in addressing environmental problems when they take place under the banner of stewardship. If these actions took place under the banners of addressing climate change or 'creating a sustainable economy' they are likely to have opposed such policies. The concept of stewardship seems to be very appealing to organisations, politicians and people in general who have little interest in climate change or sustainability. In fact, it is more than just interest and under the banner of stewardship they are willing to work on things like water pollution, soil conservation and wildlife protection. Stewardship seems to be a concept that is associated with more conservative values and behaviour but because of its close associated with more conservative values it can make more conservative oriented people undertake action which they wouldn't consider doing if they were associated with things like social justice, equality or restructuring the economy. As such the concept of stewardship can facilitate moral reframing of environmental issues and this can be very useful and making more conservative oriented people more engaged with environmental issues (for studies on the idea of morally

[56] See https://iowaagriculture.gov/ Last accessed 4 December 2018
[57] See https://www.doi.gov/stewardship Last accessed 4 December 2018
[58] See https://www.fieldandstream.com/articles/hunting/2016/01/qa-donald-trump-on-guns-hunting-and-conservation#page-2 (last accessed 4 December 2018)

reframing see Feinberg & Willer 2013; Feinberg & Willer 2015; Voelkel & Feinberg 2018). This view is also support by recent a study that found that 'stewardship beliefs' had a positive effect on concern for climate change and the environment among American Christians (Shin & Preston 2019). As such it seems to be unwise to replace the concept of stewardship with other more radical concepts as these concepts are likely to be much less successful in engaging more conservative oriented people. So, despite its flaws it is better to keep using stewardship.

7.7: Conclusion

This chapter sought to answer how Christians are able to collaborate with secular environmental groups and how much room there is for religion within such organisations. The chapter found that for many environmentally concerned Christians leaving the 'ecclesiastical bubble' is a very important part of their faith. As Christians they feel that they have a duty to go out and seek to address environmental problems with others in society although it is also important to emphasise that they believe that people of other faiths and none can be just as motivated to address environmental problems. Many environmentally concerned Christians are involved in a wide range of secular environmental organisations but although they have deep theological convictions about the need to collaborate with others they often join specific secular groups for rather practical and pragmatic reasons. They see shared concern about specific issues like fracking, conservation of specific woodlands or air pollution between themselves and other non-Christians in such organisations. Many environmentally concerned Christians are quite happy within the organisations that they have joined. However, not everything goes well some do experience that there is little room for their faith-based motivations within secular groups. There is no outright hostility, but many people just don't think that religion is relevant or interesting for secular environmental groups. Environmentally concerned Christians feel that they are unable to express their faith openly within these organisations. This does however make some environmentally concerned Christians unhappy and uncomfortable about this situation because they feel like they are being forced to hide their deepest motivation. They feel like they need to compartmentalise their faith which for them is impossible. Rather than looking at religion secular groups often prefer to work on shared concerns about specific environmental issues or policy issues. They see plenty of common group through shared environmental concern but have little interest in underlying faith-based motivations. Secular environmental groups are interested churches, faith leaders and believers but not so much in faith or theology. The reason why they are eager for churches and faith leaders to join their ranks is because they see them as an important part of communities. Based on the rather limited research of this thesis it seems like secular environmental groups are very interested in the networks, buildings and financial assets of churches but not so much in their beliefs. This being more interested in the more institutional side of religion rather than the belief side is shared by many of the writings that are in favour of the inclusion of faith-based groups in the addressing of environmental problems.

However, this disinterest in religion does place the burden of the exclusion of faith fully on the shoulders of believers. It forces environmentally concerned Christians to separate their faith from the environmental concern and this causes quite a lot of trouble for some environmentally concerned Christians and places them in *'a very uncomfortable position'* (Lucy) as an active female member of Green Christian describes. As such it turns the exclusion of faith into an *'undue mental and psychological burden for those of its citizens who follow a faith'* as Habermas (2006 p9) puts it. Such an undue burden is strongly opposed by Habermas and as such he proposes that there should be a *'complementary learning process for both religious and secular citizens'* (Habermas 2010a p21) to avoid such burdens on the shoulders of believers. Religious and secular citizens *'should speak with the other and not merely about one another'* according to Habermas (2010a, p16). However, the complementary learning process that should take place between those with faith backgrounds and those without faith, as Habermas argues, doesn't seem to be taking place. While environmentally concerned Christians are actively embracing many of the ideological positions and scientific arguments of the wider green movement this is not reciprocated, and the Christian faith is not seen as having relevance for those from non-Christian backgrounds (at least in the context of the research done for this thesis). Instead, environmentally concerned Christians feel that sometimes their faith-based motivations are forgotten, ignored or labelled 'not appropriate'. As such faith-based insights about addressing environmental problems never became *'an inspiring energy for all'* (Habermas 2006, p17) and instead they remained private motivations that weren't disclosed to other participants in secular environmental groups. As such secular environmental groups are missing important opportunities to learn from faith-based insights which might be very helpful in establishing long term and durable commitment to addressing environmental issues within their own organisation and the wider society. This then demonstrates a difference between faith-based involvement around issues like homelessness or drugs abuse and environmental problems. Studies on urban faith-based organisations and postsecularity have found that secular groups and faith-based organisations are able to establish common grounds that are more than just pragmatism and short term benefits. According to studies by human geographers within such 'postsecular partnerships' Christian ethics such agape and caritas are present and used to encourage an unconditional love for people in need (see Cloke & Beaumont 2012; Cloke et al 2013; May & Cloke 2014; Williams 2015) regardless of whether the volunteer or client have a Christian background or not. Whether Christian environmental ethics can achieve something similar is hard to tell but there are some studies that suggest that faith-based environmental groups are much more focused on long term and incremental change rather than short term policy goals (see Feldman & Moseley 2003; Smith & Pulver 2008; Kidwell et al 2018) and in that sense there might perhaps be opportunities for faith-based environmental groups to provide much needed long term commitments that can also serve as a basis to establish strong postsecular

partnerships in which both sides learn from each other's motivations and commitments.

In the end it was argued that believers should be able to openly bring their faith into secular environmental groups because firstly, believers will have to carry the full burden of the exclusion of their deepest motivation. Secondly, because in that way secular groups can also learn something from faith-based teachings on the environment and thirdly because environmentally concerned Christians have no intention to convert others or to impose their rules on secular environmental groups. Rather they want to help to address environmental problems, but they don't want to be ignored or feel excluded based on assumptions that don't reflect how they practice their faith. Lastly, this chapter asked the question whether there are Christian ideas that have been able to cross the secular/religious divide. There is just one Christian concept that has been able to go across the secular/religious divide and that is the concept of stewardship. However, stewardship is not without criticism. Stewardship doesn't seem to challenge anything or suggest a radical alternative, but it rather seeks to improve existing approaches without changing too much. Within the concept of stewardship there is a lot of emphasise on behaving responsible as individuals within the existing framework. This has been criticised by many as not being sufficient and they have sought to replace stewardship with other more radical concepts that do seek radical change and novel approaches. However, this chapter has argued that stewardship uniquely capable to cross the political divides that surround environmental issues and in able to get people involved in environmental action who without stewardship are very unlikely to be involved in environmental action.

Chapter 8
Conclusion

8.1: Outline and introduction

The following chapter of the thesis will be the conclusion. This chapter will start by briefly stating the goal of this thesis and after that it will summarise the main findings from the thesis. It will do this guided by the four research questions. After that the chapter will go on to discuss what environmentally concerned Christians can offer the wider green movement in terms of Christian thoughts, ethics or teachings that can cross over from the faith-based context into the wider green movement and following that this chapter will make suggestions about how environmentally concerned Christians can practically engage with their fellow believers and the wider society. Following these sections there will be a reflection on the research process and the used methods and finally suggestions for future research will be made. The goal of this thesis was to move beyond all the enthusiasm and speculation about the potential role that believers, churches and faith-based organisations could take up in the addressing of environmental problems and provide an empirical assessment of how believers and churches relate and engage with environment both in the context of their own congregation and within secular environmental groups. As such, the following main research question was used:

How do churchgoers and environmentally concerned Christians engage with the environment, both within the church and the wider society and how do they collaborate with the wider green movement?

In its assessment this thesis has often had a rather pessimistic view and has pointed out lots of struggles and difficulties that believers and churches face when they seek to put their faith-based environmental concerns into action. This then casts doubt on the idea that there is a substantially growing engagement with environmental issues from a faith-based perspective and as such it can be said that this thesis joins other studies that have been critical about the idea of the 'greening of religion' (Taylor et al 2016b; Kohrsen 2015; Douglas 2009). But is thesis has also argued that many Christians do have a sincere faith-based environmental concerns and that despite many struggles they are deeply committed to addressing environmental problems. What will follow now is an overview of the main findings of this thesis using the four research questions.

8.2: Churches as struggling to see beyond individual actions

The first of the sub questions focused on local churches in Exeter and explored how churches connect with their Christian faith with the environment and how this linked is put into practice. This first question was:

How do churchgoers relate and engage with the environment and how is this relationship turned into action?

As an answer to this question, this thesis has argued that all the churches that participated in the focus groups saw addressing environmental problems as an important responsibility for Christians. But even more so, participants from the focus groups argued that radical and societal wide actions are needed to move away from an economic model that favours economic growth and short-term profit. However, when talking with participants about the practical actions that they want to undertake almost all radicalism is gone and participants focus strongly on making individual lifestyle changes rather than seeking societal wide action. Participants see churches as places where believers can be taught how to make their lives greener, but believers also see very little place for the church as a community when it comes to addressing environmental problems. People were aware of this issue but struggled with finding a role that they could take up as church community. Only the participating Evangelical Anglican Church with their vegetable garden had a way to engage with the environment that involved them as a church community rather than as individuals. The participating churches themselves did not organise activities directly related to the environment nor did they pay specific attention to environment during church service. Participants did say that their church used for example Fairtrade tea and coffee and the participating liberal Anglican church had switched to a green energy provider, but participating churches also had so many issues to deal with and felt the pressure from the decline of institutional Christianity. The exception to this was the eco-church. Although this church was also focused on individual behaviour, they had a wealth of environmental related activities (from farm visits to baking communion bread) and frequently paid attention to the environment during churches services and Sunday schools and invited speakers to talk about topics relating to faith and the environment. With the eco-church the environment had been given a much more central place in church life compared with the other churches.

If environmentally concerned Christians want churches that go out and actively insert faith-based perspectives into societal discussions about environmental issues and actively participate in for example Transition town initiatives or community gardens, then it is clear that mechanisms need to be found that will enable churchgoers to undertake more collective action. The problem is that churchgoers do want more collective environmental action (as expressed in the focus groups) but they don't know how to achieve it. The eco-church scheme might be an interesting option to choose in such a situation as it provides clear guidelines for churches to follow (it also contains guidelines on community engagement). Although, the eco-church was still struggling with findings ways to engage as a community they also fared much better in bringing the environment into church life compared to the other participating churches. The struggles with community engagement might also reflect the strong emphasis on behavioural change through the lens consumer citizens that is dominant in the wider society (Slocum 2004; Johnson 2008; Jones et al 2011; Whitehead et al 2011) and as such finding ways to enable churchgoers to put into practice all their desires and wishes for societal wide change is important in order to enable churchgoers to move beyond addressing environmental issues through their roles as consumer citizens and

allow Christian environmental ethics to challenge the ways through society engages with environment.

However, it is also important to emphasise that the focus groups were solely focused on a small group of churches from a limited range of theological backgrounds from within the Exeter area and as such the findings are limited in scope and can certainly not be applied to other contexts without careful consideration and it is very likely that for churches within other contexts the relations between faith-based motivations and practical actions will be different.

8.3: Environmentally concerned Christians and their churches

The second and third sub-research questions focused on environmentally concerned Christians and studied how these Christians related their Christian faith to environmental issues and put their faith-based environmental concerns into action but also focused on the struggles that they encountered when tried to engage other Christians with their concerns:

How do environmentally concerned Christians relate and engage with the environment and how is this relationship turned into action? And in what ways is this different compared with 'ordinary churchgoers'?

What difficulties are environmentally concerned Christians experiencing? And how are environmentally concerned Christians finding a shared concern for the environment with their fellow believers?

In relation to the second research question this thesis has argued that environmentally concerned Christians have a deep and sincere faith-based concern about the environment. However, in contrast with the focus groups environmentally concerned Christians also go far beyond the individual behaviour. They see caring for the environment as a 'way of life' and are involved in a whole host of environmental activities that often take place within secular groups. Within this 'green Christian faith' there are elements visible that seem to resemble conversion in the sense that this green faith message is often positioned as something different and distinct from the 'ordinary' Christian message but also as a much-needed message that will transform Christians. However, with regards to the third research question this thesis found that many environmentally concerned Christians are struggling to engage with their church on environmental issues. Often they are faced with disinterest, inaction and even denial when they seek to bring the environment to the attention of their fellow churchgoers. Another serious problem for many environmentally concerned Christians is that due to ageing and the numerically decline of many churches they just don't have the resources or people to get involved with environmental issues. These problems pose very serious problems for any take up of environmental issues within churches. However, the cause of the indifference and denial is not to be found within theology

or an anthropocentric view which originate from Christian theology (White 1967 most famously held this view point) but this thesis has argued that the problem stems from the inevitable mixing together of theology, science and politics that takes place when believers engage with environmental issues. This thesis has emphasised the point that religion alone doesn't make a believer care about the environment but that instead faith works through other factors. If people believe things like the scientific underpinnings of environmental problems, had a green upbringing and are left leaning than their Christian can provide a strong faith-based incentive to address environmental problems. In such a scenario faith can really form a strong layer that keeps believers motivated when they are confronted with the decline of institutionalised Christianity, inaction among churchgoers or when there other scientific and political arguments are being opposed by fellow believers. However, if people are for example sceptical about the science, prefer individual freedom over collective action and are more right leaning than the opposite can happen, and faith can provide a strong faith-based incentive, through for example end time thinking or disregarding environmentalism as Neopaganism, which downplays environmental problems and stimulates opposition to environmental action. People who opposed the calls for action by Pope Francis or Archbishop Justin Welby did not disagree with their theology. They too believe that Christians are called to stewards and that they need to take care of creation and they also want to help out when natural disasters strike Bangladesh or Haiti. However, when faith leaders say that climate change demonstrates that Christians are not good stewards these people will disregard their words as they don't see climate change as a serious issue.

This difficult relationship between faith and environmental action, whereby faith on its own doesn't change how people care or interact with the environment makes engaging believers on environmental issues much more complex as faith-based concern for the environment needs to be built on an already existing interest and concern for the environment which the Christian faith in turn can strengthen and support. Creating up such a 'pre-faith' interest and concern in the environment is very difficult, especially with the ongoing polarisation that surrounds environmental issues. Scholars have suggested various ways through which people can be convinced about the fact that environmental issues (especially climate change) are real and urgent and need addressing. Suggestions include the moral reframing of environmental problems (as also discussed in chapter 7, see Feinberg & Willer 2013; Feinberg & Willer 2015; Voelkel & Feinberg 2018; Wolsko et al 2016), others have argued that despite the controversy around climate science people are still more likely to be convinced when scientific consensus is emphasised (van der Linden et al 2015; van der Linden et al 2017; van der Linden et al 2018) but even others have argued that when talking about environmental issues the most effective way is to avoid the term climate change completely and replace it with 'non-climate change oriented risks' such as air pollution (Hart & Feldman 2018). Scholars have also emphasised the need to link environmental issues to the place where people are living or to make the environment seem relatable and human

(see Vorkinn & Riese 2001; Scannell & Gifford, 2013; Devine-Wright et al 2015 for work on place attachment but also Tam et al 2013 on the positive effects of anthropomorphising nature). Whether Christian theology or Christian ethics can contribute novel ideas to solving this problem is hard to tell from the scope of this thesis. However, this thesis has shown some examples, whereby, despite reluctance and disinterest from fellow churchgoers, environmentally concerned Christians were able raise money for solar panels on their church roof, put swift boxes in place and allow wildlife to flourish in the churchyard. These successes didn't come through novel theological insights but rather through careful listening, speaking and explaining to other churchgoers and being patient. As such this thesis has also argued that engagement with believers needs to happen on a local and personal level rather than by distant academic theologians or faith leaders.

8.4: The difficult place of religion with secular environmental groups

The fourth and final research sub-question considered how environmentally concerned Christians are working together with other non-Christians on environmental issues and what role their faith could play within such collaborations.

How are environmentally concerned believers finding common ground with secular groups and how do they collaborate with each other? And to what extent are secular groups willing to give space to faith-based motivation?

With regards to the final research question this thesis has argued that many of the environmentally concerned Christians are very pleased with their involvement in secular environmental groups and see their involvement in such groups as a way to get more practically involved and they also strongly believe that Christians should be involved and visible in the wider society. However, despite being happy with their involvement they also feel that there is very little room for their religious beliefs and that their beliefs are not always welcome and seen as something private with little relevance to the wider organisation. So, while environmentally concerned Christians are actively embracing many of the positions and arguments of the green movement this is not reciprocated, and this can leave environmentally concerned Christian quite sad and frustrated because they see so much common ground between themselves and secular environmental groups. According to Habermas we '*should speak with the other and not merely about one another'* (2010a, p16) but from the admittedly limited scope of this thesis it seems like there is little talk about the faith-based motivations of environmentally concerned Christians. Habermas emphasises the point that we should not *'pre-emptively reduce the polyphonic complexity of the diverse public voices, because it cannot know whether it is not otherwise cutting society off from scarce resources for the generation of meanings and the shaping of identities'* (Habermas 2008, p29). But this reducing of complexity is exactly what seems to be taking place within secular environmental groups. Faith-based motivations and Christian ethics are not needed because *'It just doesn't come up'* or *'it just felt that wasn't appropriate for*

that' and as such opportunities for a 'complementary learning process' (Habermas 2006; Habermas 2008) are missed and the insights from Christian environmental ethics are not used to strengthen the arguments of the wider green movement and instead believers feel that they must keep their faith-based motivations to themselves and not bring them up during their involvement with secular environmental groups. Consequently, environmentally concerned Christians described how they felt like they were forced to separate their environmental concern from their Christian faith, something which they found was very difficult if not impossible to do as their Christian faith and their environmental concerns are completely intertwined. So, just simply demanding or expecting believers to leave out their faith-based motivations while being involved in secular environmental activities is not possible. It is asking people to leave their deepest and most sincere convictions outside and this makes the exclusion of religion into an *'undue mental and psychological burden for those of its citizens who follow a faith'* as Habermas (2006 p9) puts it. But not only made this environmentally concerned Christians feel sometimes quite unhappy within secular environmental groups it also made the common grounds between environmentally concerned Christians and others very pragmatic and focused on specific issues. Although there is plenty of common ground between environmentally concerned Christians and secular environmental groups these common grounds are very pragmatic and focus on specific issues and do not focus on long term partnerships based around common long-term ideals.

However, what is clear is that there are substantial differences between the collaborations of secular and faith-based groups on social issues like homelessness drug rehabilitation and the collaborations on environmental issues. Studies on urban faith-based organisations and postsecularity have found that secular groups and faith-based organisations are able to establish common grounds that are more than just pragmatism and short-term benefits. According to these studies within such 'postsecular partnerships' Christian ethics such as agape and caritas are present and used to encourage an unconditional love for people in need (see Cloke & Beaumont 2012; Cloke et al 2013; May & Cloke 2014; Williams 2015) regardless of whether volunteer or client have a Christian background or not. Whether Christian environmental ethics can also 'give something' to non-Christians in a similar way is hard to tell, but in this thesis it was argued that several studies have found that Christian environmental groups (in comparison with secular groups) are much more focused on long term, incremental and societal wide range rather than focusing on short term policy goals (see Feldman & Moseley 2003; Smith & Pulver 2008; Kidwell et al 2018) and in that sense there might perhaps be opportunities for faith-based environmental groups to provide much needed long term commitments that can also serve as a basis to establish strong postsecular partnerships in which both sides learn from each other's motivations and commitments.

8.5: What can environmentally concerned Christians share?

The question that remains is, what Christian thought, ethics or teaching is out there that can be used to construct a crossover narrative (Cloke & Beaumont 2012) between environmental concerned Christians and the wider environmental movement? Although this thesis has argued that stewardship is able to crossover to non-Christian contexts, the concept of stewardship is much more suited for engaging those who are much more disinterested in environmental issues rather than making bridges with the wider green movement. At least within the context of this thesis there were no Christian ethics, teachings and thoughts coming out of the focus groups or being expressed during in-depth interviews which can crossover or which are already crossing over. As the analysis of the focus groups and also the analysis of the in-depth interviews has shown, often theological arguments are linked with stewardship and loving your neighbours and whereas stewardship has potential in reaching out to those with less interest in environmental issues, loving your neighbour is in essence an argument to address human tragedies rather than environmental problems. However, there might be one Christian concept/idea that has been able to cross into the wider green movement and perhaps even beyond. This is the idea that Green Christian describes as 'Joy in Enough'.

Much of the current environmental problems are caused by an ever-growing desire to consume more and more. Each year a new phone is needed, cars or holidays need to be bigger, better or faster than the previous one and companies and the stock exchange needs to grow more each year. This strong desire for (economic) growth has been criticised by many and many environmentally concerned Christians are very interested in the idea of moving away from economic growth. However, it is very difficult to move away from this desire for more. In an attempt to challenge this mind set Green Christian has launched a campaign called Joy in Enough[59]. Part of the arguments that Green Christian makes are secular and focus on the environmental effect of overconsumption and the injustice inflicted on those who need to produce all the consumer goods in for example sweatshops. However, beyond the scientific and justice arguments it was also argued that it was a 'Christian thing' to launch this campaign because the bible tells believers to have 'joy in enough'. Using well-known verses like Matthew 6:19-21 which state:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

And with ideas like the year of Jubilee the case was made that happiness and enjoyment are not to be found within acquiring more goods but rather beyond that, namely in your heart, in your relations and in the beauty of nature. So, not the

[59] https://joyinenough.org/

temporality of economic growth or the purchase of a sports car brings enjoyment, but enjoyment is beyond those things and can be found in for example relationships, walks in nature and the Christian faith. Although, the Joy in Enough campaign is still developing I think that the idea of having 'joy in enough' might be powerful and able to persuade not just Christians but might also be able to crossover to non-Christian contexts and turned into a stimulus to reduce consumption and challenge the current economic system.

8.6: What can believers do?

However, a related question but probably even more important question is, what can environmentally concerned Christians, churches and faith-based organisations practically do to make believers more committed to addressing environmental issues and how can environmentally concerned Christians reach out to those who have little interest in environmental issues? Although it is clear that religion alone won't make people go green there are two things that believers, churches and faith-based organisations can do. Firstly, even though difficult and frustrating at times environmentally concerned Christians should continue to engage with their fellow believers and secondly, environmentally concerned Christians should be freely sharing the faith-based underpinnings of their environmental concerns.

Although not easy it is very important that environmentally concerned Christians continue to engage with churchgoers who might be less committed to environmental causes or perhaps even dismisses about their concerns. Although, far from perfect the eco-church scheme can provide churches with a fruitful approach that will give the environment a much more prominent position in church life. As this thesis has shown, it enabled the participating eco-church to bring lots of environmentally relevant issues into church life. The leader of the eco-church said that the eco-church approach *'anchors what we're doing as a central part of the church its life'*. This process of making the environment a central part of church life is precisely what so many environmentally concerned Christians are struggling to achieve within their churches. As such the eco-church might be a fruitful way for many churches to bring the environment closer to its members. However, not all environmentally concerned Christians will be able to turn their church into an eco-church. But as already mentioned earlier in this conclusion, despite all the reluctance and disinterest from fellow churchgoers, some environmentally concerned Christians were able raise funding for solar panels on their church roof, let wildlife flourish in the churchyard and enable churchgoers to enjoy God's creation. This was not achieved through heated debates or force but by careful listening and speaking and allowing others to give input as well. By being patient and adapting to the situation these environmentally concerned Christians were within the constraints of their situation able to achieve quite remarkable change. As such it will be good to continue listening and with fellow believers about the things that environmentally concerned Christians care the most.

Environmentally concerned Christians should also freely express their faith-based motivations and never feel like they need to hide or obscure them. Their faith is an important motivator and as this thesis has demonstrated hiding it or being forced to hide it poses a serious burden on environmentally concerned Christians and prevents others from gaining insights from these Christian environmental ethics. Christian environmental ethics are not just a way to convert people or extend the influence of religion nor are Christian environmental ethics inappropriate or irrelevant for secular environmental groups. Rather faith-based arguments are made by people who deeply care about the environment and who want those of different or no faiths to join in as well and share in each other's arguments and motivations to further strengthen their commitment to address environmental problems together. As this thesis has demonstrated, the idea of stewardship has a very wide appeal that extends to those who are much less interested in environmental problems and in the previous section it was also argued that the idea of 'joy in enough' might have an appeal to wider environmental/justice movement. As such, openly and sincerely explaining why your personal faith encourages you to address air pollution or food waste might be the start of a fruitful 'complementary learning process' through which faith is not side-lined and seen as inappropriate or needing translation into 'an universally accessible language' (Habermas 2006) but instead is used as source from which people can create crossover narratives which will strengthen the appeal of environmental care and in which faith-based arguments can be used to reach out to those who are unlikely to be persuaded by scientific facts or economic and justice-oriented arguments that are currently being used by environmental groups.

8.7: Reflection on the research process and methods

This thesis studied how Christians relate their faith to the environment and turn their faith-based environmental concern into action within their own church and within the wider green movement. However, although there is also much attention for the calls for action in Europe most existing studies are still very much focused on the United States. Especially, non-American qualitative studies are sparse and also because environmental issues are so different for churches and believers than homelessness or food banks this thesis couldn't just focus on collaboration between faith-based groups and secular environmental groups alone but first had to understand the eco-theology in churches and how believers put their environmental concerns into action in their own lives and within their churches before any attempt to study 'postsecular rapprochement' between the green movement and churches and faith-based organisations could take place. Consequently, this thesis explored a bit of everything. It explored how local churches relate their faith with environmental issues, it studied how environmentally concerned Christians seek to put their concerns into action within their church and the wider green movement and finally it researched the role of faith within secular environment groups. Because these three things had to be studied within one thesis this thesis couldn't provide a very extensive overview with

for example 8 or 10 churches nor could it research a wide variety of secular environmental groups. As such, this thesis provides insights into a small selection of believers, churches and organisation. Sometimes it felt that due to the many topics within this thesis, the methodology only allowed small sneak peeks into a much bigger underlying issue like ‘how are theological insights turned into action’, ‘how do believers react when their faith has political implications’, or ‘what role can religion play within secular contexts’. As such each of three of the empirical chapters could have been turned into an entire thesis on its own if more research on the topic was conducted.

For this thesis I met many Christians from many different branches of Christianity and despite wanting to be a good and objective scientist looking back at the whole research process it is clear that through my own positionality I had a bias towards the bits of Christianity which were familiar to me. In my thesis I have written extensively about how stewardship can reach those less interested in environmental issues. But at the same time, I did very little with the idea of interconnectedness that the Liberal Anglican participants used even though this idea of interconnectedness might be very well be appealing to many people within the secular environmental movement who aren’t Christians. This idea of being connected with the rest of nature could be a bridge that links Christians like the Liberal Anglican participants into feelings and expressions that are widely shared within in the Green movement but due my own focus on more familiar parts of Christianity I never recognised interconnectedness as much more than a theological tool to link faith with environmental concern and thereby missing opportunities to study the links between the Christian faith and the wider Green movement. In the end this thesis has to some extent been coloured by my own experiences of what it means to be a Christian, but those experiences do not necessarily reflect those of other Christians.

8.8: Future Research

Ever since White (1967) argued that Christian thinking has enabled the destruction of the natural world have scholars been trying to understand how faith influences the ways in which people understand, relate and engage with the environment. However, due to the ongoing environmental problems have scholars increasingly not only tried to understand whether religion is harmful but also whether religion can be part of the solution. As such more and more sociologists, human geographers, political scientists, psychologists, anthropologists and theologians have been studying how religion influences the ways in which people relate and engage with the environment and how individual believers, churches and faith-based organisations can help to address issues like climate change, air pollution or food waste. However, because it is still such relative new research interest for most scholars there is lots of research to be done.

Firstly, it would be very interesting and relevant to investigate the long-term impact of initiatives like the eco- church scheme. Does it really influence churchgoers or is merely a 'hobby' for a small group of environmentally concerned churchgoers that has little impact on the wider church? Same goes for the calls for action by faith leaders. Will Pope Francis' words have had any lasting impact on Catholics in ten years' time or will all the copies of Laudato Si be gathering dust on a bookshelf? Or perhaps making courses in eco-theology a compulsory part of the curriculum at theological colleges and seminaries for clergy in training might also have a positive impact in the long run. Having a successful way to engage churchgoers seems vital but also difficult. As such research into finding long term effective ways in engaging churchgoers is necessary.

Secondly, this thesis has found that environmentally concerned Christians feel that there is very little space for their Christian faith in secular environmental groups. Such a finding has profound implications for the success of any kind of collaboration between environmentally concerned Christians and secular environmental groups as many Christians might be hesitant in joining groups where their faith-based motivation has no place. However, this finding is only based on experiences from a select group of environmentally concerned Christians and interviews with environmental groups that are local to Exeter. As such much more research on the role of faith in a much wider variety of secular environmental groups is needed before any substantial answer can be given.

The third point is closely related to second point and that is that for this thesis only a small selection of churches was used in the focus groups. There are so many types of churches that adhere to different theologies and who attract different people and who as a result might relate their faith to the environment is very different ways. So, much more research is needed to understand how local churches engage with the environment.

Fourthly, it would be very interesting to do a more quantitative study into the relationships between religion and the environment within Europe. Almost all such studies are American and give a very useful but also very American picture. There are few studies that do focus on Europe (see Hayes & Marangudakis 2000; Hayes & Marangudakis 2001; Village 2015; Hagavi 2014**)** but these studies use smaller self-collected samples, or they rely on older data sets. For example, the studies by Hayes & Marangudakis (2000) and Hayes & Marangudakis (2001) use data from 1993 while Hagavi (2014) uses data from 2002. However, the 2017 edition of the European Values Survey contains lots of data about religious values and environmental degradation/pollution and protection but also lots of data on other variables such education, age, politics, economics, employment, cultural and national identities and much more. Therefore, analysing the data from 2017 edition of the European Values Survey can be very interesting for a quantitative investigation in how religion can influence views on environmental issues and how

religion interacts with other variables that are known to influence people' attitudes towards the environment.

Lastly, within much of the literature on religion and environment there is extensive attention to believers who have little interest in the environment or who deny climate change but there is also very little direct interaction with these people. Whereas there many in-depth and qualitative studies on religious environmental activists (see for example Nita 2016 and Witt 2016 and also this thesis) most religious sceptics are merely described as right-wing and adhering to conservative theological positions without given more details or motivations as to why they adhere to these positions. This ignoring of sceptics and others who are disinterested also takes place throughout the social sciences. Environmental activists have been extensively studied by many social scientists with use of for example in-depth interviews, focus groups, action research and ethnographical research. Meanwhile climate sceptics are often depicted as 'cool white dudes' (McCright & Dunlap 2011) who are right wing, prone to believe in conspiracy theories and who have a very low trust in science and if there is any more research it is often through content analysis of newspapers, blogs or social media (see for example Woods et al 2012**;** Koteyko et al 2013; Sharman 2014; Matthews 2015; Boussalis & Coan 2016). There are no (or very few) in-depth studies into the understanding of their motives like there are in-depth studies with environmental activists. But understanding sceptics and others who are disinterested and finding ways to get them onboard will be essential for any attempt to address environmental issues. As such it would be very interesting and necessary to move beyond surveys and content analysis when trying to understand people who are unwilling to address environmental issues.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Resources used for scheme 'Theological approaches to the Environment'

Archbishop of Canterbury (2009) Archbishop of Canterbury: Environment is 'an issue of justice' http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/1079/archbishop-of-canterbury-environment-is-an-issue-of-justice (accessed on 11-01-2019)

Benedict XVI (2009) Caritas in Veritate (Charity in Truth). San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press.

Berry, T (1988) The Dream of the Earth. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books

Chryssavgis, J (2007) Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew: insights into an Orthodox Christian worldview. *International Journal of Environmental Studies*. Volume 64 Number 11 p9–18.

Ellard,P (2012) Not green enough: a response to the green pope and the green patriarch based on the dark green thought of Thomas Berry, *International Journal of Environmental Studies*. Volume 69 Number 3 p524-539

Francis (2015) Encyclical Letter Laudato Si of the Holy Father Francis on care for our common home. Vatican City: Vatican Press

Fox, M (2006) A New Reformation: Creation Spirituality & The Transformation of Christianity. Rochester: Inner Traditions

Hayhoe, K, Farley, A (2011) A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions. New York City: FaithWorks

John Paul II (2002) Common Declaration of Pope John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at the Fourth Ecological Symposium on the Adriatic Sea. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/speeches/2004/july/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_20040701_jp-ii-bartholomew-i_en.html accessed on 11-01-2019

Koenig-Bricker, W (2009) Ten Commandments for the Environment: Pope Benedict XVI Speaks Out for Creation and Justice (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press).

Kearns, L (1996) Saving the Creation: Christian Environmentalism in the United States. *Sociology of Religion* Volume 57 Number 1 p55-70

Schaefer, J (2009) Theological foundations for environmental ethics: reconstructing patristic and medieval concepts. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press

Stott, J (2014) The Radical Disciple: Wholehearted Christian Living. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press (especially chapter 4)

Wirza, N (2011) A Priestly Approach to Environmental Theology: Learning to Receive and Give Again the Gifts of Creation. *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* Volume 50, Number 4 p354-362

Appendix 2: Book list

Atkinson, D (2008) Renewing the Face of the Earth: A Theological and Pastoral Response to Climate Change. Norwich: Canterbury Press

Bauckham, R (2011) Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology. Waco: Baylor University Press

Cooper, T (1990) Green Christianity: Caring for the whole Creation. London: Spire, Hodder & Stoughton Publishers

Deane-Drummond, C (2008) Eco-Theology. London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd

Habel, N (2000) Readings from the perspective of Earth. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press

Hill, B (1998) Christian Faith and the Environment: Making vital connections. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books

Horrell, D, Hunt, C, Southgate, C (2010) Greening Paul: Rereading the Apostle in a time of ecological Crisis. Waco: Baylor University Press

Horrell, D, Hunt, C, Southgate, C, Stavrakopoulou, F (2010) Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical and Theological Perspectives. New York: T&T Clark

Horrell, D (2010) The Bible and the Environment. Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology. London: Equinox

Hudson, M, Hudson, M (2015) A Christian Guide to Environmental Issues. Abingdon: The Bible Reading Fellowship

Francis, P (2015) Encyclical Letter ‘Laudato Si’ of the Holy Father Francis on care for our common home. Vatican City: Vatican Press

King, C (2002) Habitat of Grace: Biology, Christianity and the Global Environmental Crisis. Hindmarsh: Australian Theological Forum.

Marlow, H, (2009) Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics. Oxford University Press.

Martin-Schramm, J & Stivers, R (2003) Christian Environmental Ethics: A case Method Approach. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books

McFague, S (2008) A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming. Minneapolis: Fortress Press

Northcott, M (1996) The Environment & Christian Ethics. Cambridge University Press

Northcott, M (2013) A Political Theology of Climate Change. London: SPCK

Oelschlaeger, M (1994) Caring for Creation: An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis. New Haven: Yale University Press

Osborn, L (1993) Guardians of Creation: Nature in theology and the Christian Life. Leicester: Apollos

Santmire, P (2000) Nature Reborn: The Ecological and Cosmic Promise of Christian theology. Minneapolis: Fortress Press

Schaefer, J (2009) Theological foundations for Environmental Ethics: Reconstructing Patristic & Medieval Concepts. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press

Scheid, D (2016) The Cosmic Common Good: Religious Grounds for Ecological Ethics. Oxford: Oxford University press

Appendix 3: Survey Questions

* 1. What is your gender?

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female

* 2. What church do you belong to?

- ◯ Anglican
- ◯ Roman Catholic
- ◯ Methodist
- ◯ United Reformed
- ◯ Baptist
- ◯ Pentecostal/ Charismatic
- ◯ Quakers
- ◯ I don't belong to any church
- ◯ Another church namely..

* 3. What is your age?

- ◯ 17 years or younger
- ◯ 18- 25 years old
- ◯ 26- 35 years old
- ◯ 36- 45 years old
- ◯ 46- 55 years old
- ◯ 56- 65 years old
- ◯ 66-75 years old
- ◯ 76 years old or older

* 4. Which political party do you support the most?

- ◯ Conservative
- ◯ Labour
- ◯ Green Party
- ◯ UKIP
- ◯ Liberal Democrat
- ◯ SNP
- ◯ Another party namely:

* 5. Which one of the following statements about God is closest to your belief?

- ◯ There is a personal God
- ◯ There is some God, spirit or life force
- ◯ I don't know if there is a God, spirit or life force
- ◯ There is no God, spirit or life force

* 6. How often do you attend religious services? (apart from weddings, funerals and baptisms)

- ◯ Never
- ◯ Only on special occasions such as Christmas or Eastern
- ◯ Less than once a year
- ◯ About once or twice a year
- ◯ Several times a year
- ◯ About once a month
- ◯ Two to three times a month
- ◯ Weekly or more

* 7. Please, tell to what extend you agree or disagree with the following statements

	Yes, I completely agree	Yes, I agree	Neither agree nor disagree	No, I disagree	No, I strongly disagree
The Bible is the inspired and infallible word of God	○	○	○	○	○
I do not have any objections against same sex marriage	○	○	○	○	○
When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences	○	○	○	○	○
Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature	○	○	○	○	○
God is present in nature	○	○	○	○	○
I have experienced the presence of God when I have been in nature	○	○	○	○	○
My faith in an important motivator in addressing environmental issues	○	○	○	○	○

* 8. How concerned are clergy (vicars, pastors, priests etc..) in your church about the environment?

- They are concerned about the environment
- They are somewhat concerned about the environment
- They are neither concerned nor unconcerned about the environment
- They are somewhat unconcerned about the environment
- They are unconcerned about the environment
- I don't know how concerned they are
- I don't go to church

* 9. Should the environment have a bigger place in your church?

- Yes, a much bigger place
- Yes, a bigger place
- The current situation is sufficient
- No, it should have a smaller place
- No, it should have a much smaller place
- I don't go to church

* 10. Do you discuss environmental issues with other church members?

- Yes, I do
- Yes, I do but not very often
- No, but I do want to
- No, and I don't want to discuss environmental issues
- I don't go to church

* 11. If you discuss environmental issues with other church members, how do they respond?

- ◯ They don't see it as an issue that is relevant for the church
- ◯ They deny the science or the severity of the issue
- ◯ They agree on the severity but don't undertake action
- ◯ They agree and are willing to help addressing environmental issues
- ◯ I don't discuss environmental issues
- ◯ I don't go to church

* 12. Churches should take actively part in the political debates surrounding issues such as climate change

- ◯ Yes, I completely agree
- ◯ Yes, I agree
- ◯ Neither agree nor disagree
- ◯ No, I disagree
- ◯ No, I strongly disagree

* 13. Are you a member, volunteer or do you financially support any secular environmental organisations (such as WWF, Transition Town or Friends of the Earth)

- ◯ Yes, I do
- ◯ No, I don't but I do want to
- ◯ No, and I don't want to

* 14. Do you think that religious organisations and secular environmental organisations should collaborate?

- ◯ Yes, I completely agree
- ◯ Yes, I agree
- ◯ Neither agree nor disagree
- ◯ No, I disagree
- ◯ No, I strongly disagree

Thank you for filling in the questionnaire. All answers are confident and anonymous and will only be used during the PhD research. If you liked the survey or found it an interesting or important topic and you would like help more. That's possible because I'm looking for people who are willing to be interviewed about their faith and their involvement in the Green movement. These interviews will remain anonymous and will only be used for the PhD research. Please fill in your email address below if you're interested and I will be in contact with you. If not interested, just click on done.

15. Email

Name

Email Address

Appendix 4: Consent forms; **Consent Form in-depth interviews**

PhD research by Derk Harmannij:

Practicing faith based environmentalism in a post-secular society

You are invited to participate in my research about the practice of faith based environmentalism. Please read carefully the following information and let me know whether you would like to participate. Please, also contact me or one of my supervisors if you have any questions about the research.

The research you're invited to participate in is my PhD research. I'm Derk Harmannij and I'm a PhD student in the School of Geography at the University of Exeter. My research focuses on how Christians are involved in addressing environmental issues and what experiences environmentally concerned Christians have and how more generally Christians see the relationship between their faith and the environment and what role the environment plays in different churches. There will also be attention for the interaction between Christians and the wider (secular) Green Movement.

If you agree to participate I will interview you for my PhD research. During this interview we will talk about your experiences as an environmentally concerned Christian and what role the environment plays in different churches. Before we start I will also tell something about myself. During the interview we will talk about your experiences in church and faith based environmental organisations and if relevant we will also talk about your experiences in secular environmental organisations. We will also talk about your faith. There are no right or wrong answers and you can say anything that you think will be useful during our conversation. Do not feel any pressure to answer a question in a certain way.

The conversation will be taped (only if you agree) but everything that we will say during the interview will remain strictly anonymous and will not be able to trace back to you in any way. Nobody apart from me will have access to the recording that I take during the interview. The interview will only be used for my PhD research. This includes the final PhD thesis and academic journal articles or book chapters that come out of my PhD research. It will never be used for anything else.

You will remain anonymous in all these publications unless you explicitly want to be mentioned in the research. You will also receive an electronic copy of the final PhD thesis. If you want to you can always withdraw from the interview. As people live all across the UK the preferred way to arrange the interview will be Skype, unless you live relative close to Exeter. Telephone also can be an option. Sometimes I have to travel to different places in the UK and we might be able to meet somewhere else. If you have any questions please, contact me.

Researcher:
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Appendix 4 continued: Consent Form Focus groups

PhD research by Derk Harmannij:

Practicing faith based environmentalism in a post-secular society

You are invited to participate in my research about the practice of faith based environmentalism. Please read carefully the following information and let me know whether you would like to participate. Please, also contact me or one of my supervisors if you have any questions about the research.

The research you're invited to participate in is my PhD research. I'm Derk Harmannij and I'm a PhD student in the School of Geography at the University of Exeter. My research focuses on how Christians see the relationship between their faith and the environment, what role the environment plays in different churches and how Christians put their environmental concerns into practice. There will also be attention for the interaction between Christians and the wider (secular) Green Movement in my thesis.

If you agree to participate in my research you will take part in a group interview with other people from your church. First, I will start with a 'little exercise' to get everyone thinking about faith and the environment and then discuss some questions with the group. If you are sceptical, you don't see the importance of the environment in your faith or you have never thought about it then you are still very welcome. The questions won't be difficult and you don't need to have extensive knowledge about theology or environmental science. There are no right or wrong answers and you can say anything that you think will be useful during our conversation. Do not feel any pressure to answer a question in a certain way.

The interview will be taped (only if you agree) but everything that we will say during the group interview will remain strictly anonymous and will not be able to trace back to you in any way. Nobody apart from me will have access to the recording that I take during the interview. The interview will only be used for my PhD research. This includes the final PhD thesis and academic journal articles or book chapters that come out of my PhD research. It will never be used for anything else.

You will remain anonymous in all these publications unless you explicitly want to be mentioned in the research. You will also receive an electronic copy of the

final PhD thesis. If you want to you can always withdraw from the group interview.

Researcher:
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Appendix 4 continued: Consent Form Participant Observations

PhD research by Derk Harmannij:

Practicing faith based environmentalism in a post-secular society

During the activity in which you are participating I will be gathering data for my PhD research about the practice of faith based environmentalism. Green Christian has been so kind to give me access to some of their activities. During today's event I will make observations for my research. Please read carefully the following information and let me know whether you have any objections or questions. Please, contact me or one of my supervisors if you have any questions about the research.

My name is Derk Harmannij and I'm a PhD student in the School of Geography at the University of Exeter. My research focuses on how Christians are involved in the Green Movement and what experiences these environmentally concerned Christians have. There is also be attention for the interaction between Christians and the wider (secular) Green Movement in my research.

During the today's activity I will make observations about the things that are going on. This practically means that I will be writing down notes about relevant and interesting things that take place and that are being said during the activity. If people are willing, I will also briefly talk with them about their experiences as environmentally concerned Christians. However, everything that takes place during the activity and everything that people tell will remain strictly anonymous and will not be able to trace back to you in any way.

The things I see and write down during the activity will only be used be for my PhD research. This includes the final PhD thesis and academic journal articles or book chapters that come out of my PhD research. It will never be used for anything else. Prior to the publication of the PhD thesis I will send a draft to the leadership of Green Christian on which they can give comments. You will remain anonymous in all these publications unless you explicitly want to be mentioned in the research. You will also receive an electronic copy of the final PhD thesis.

If you feel uncomfortable about my presence or you do not want to be included in my research please let me know and I won't include you in my research. I'm not looking for right or wrong answers and you can say anything that you want,

do not feel any pressure by my presence. If you want you can always refuse to be part of my research. If it's deemed necessary by the leadership of Green Christian I will always stop making my observations.

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Appendix 5: Focus group descriptions

Methodist Church Exeter

In total there were 9 talking participants, 5 male and 4 female. All participants were active Methodists who frequently attended church and lived in Exeter. All the participants from the focus came from a bible study group that met in the houses of the group members. Also the focus group took place in the house of one of the group members. All participants knew each other. Most people were older, around retirement age and over. But some were also younger (40 & 50's) but there were no students or youth. There were more people present in the room than participated in the focus group, probably around 12 but not everyone talked during the focus group. Those that didn't talk were the oldest and probably in their 80's or even older.

Liberal Anglican Church Exeter

In total there were 5 participants, 3 male and 2 female. All participants were active churchgoing Anglicans and lived in Exeter. The group consisted of the vicar and four church members with who the vicar discussed her plans for services and sermon. The focus group took place at the house of the vicar. All participants knew each other very well and had discussed about various theological topics before. The three males were all retired but the females were younger. There were no other people present and also no young people.

Catholic Church Exeter

In total there were 5 participants, 3 male and 2 female. All participants were active Catholics who lived in Exeter. The focus group took place in the evening after a Mass on a weekday. Prior to the focus group the priest had announced that churchgoers were invited to join the focus group. In total 5 did so (there were not many people attending Mass that evening). As such the focus group was quite a random collection of Catholic churchgoers and I wasn't sure if everybody knew each other very well. The participants were an international student from Exeter University, the priest, a male (likely to be already retired) and a mother and daughter. The mother was sitting in a wheel chair and elderly. The focus group took place in the church centre and there were no other people present.

Evangelical Anglican Church

In total there were 6 participants, 4 male and 2 female. All participants were involved with Evangelical Anglican church. The focus group took place during a

‘drop in lunch’ during a workday. This drop in lunch was co-organised by the faith-based organisation Christians Against Poverty. Normally, the event would include a lunch and a short talk about the bible but this time the focus group replaced the short talk about the bible. The event was run by the church volunteers and clients from Christians Against Poverty would be there as well. During the event there were many people present, including people with young children. As such the average age was much lower. My guess was that there were around 12 people. Quite a few people spoke during the focus group but some also didn’t speak and just ate their lunch and listened and made the occasional comment. In the end there was ongoing discussion with 6 people, including the leader. The focus group took place at the office space of the church.

Eco-church

With the eco-church it was not possible to have a focus group due to lack of participants. So instead there were two interviews. One interview with a churchgoer who had intended to join the focus group and a second interview was held with the leader of eco-church activities. He was also involved in the wider leadership of the church. I also studied the green resources on their website (which on their new website are gone). Additionally, I spoke informally with churchgoers about the environment.

Appendix 6: Data Survey

Variable		%	N
What is your gender?			93
	Male	45.16%	
	Female	54.84%	
What is your age?			93
	<17	1.08%	
	18-25	1.08%	
	26-35	4.30%	
	36-45	6.45%	
	46-55	20.43%	
	56-65	25.81%	
	66-75	29.03%	
	>76	11.83%	
What church do you belong to?			93
	Anglican	47.31%	
	Roman Catholic	4.30%	
	Methodist	11.83%	
	United Reformed	5.38%	
	Baptist	12.90%	
	Pentecostal/ Charismatic	1.08%	
	Quakers	1.08%	
	No Church	4.30%	
	Another Church	11.83%	
Which political party do you support the most?			93
	Conservative	4.30%	
	Labour	23.66%	
	Green Party	48.39%	
	UKIP	1.08%	
	Liberal Democrat	17.20%	
	SNP	1.08%	

	Another party namely:	4.30%	
Which one of the following statements about God is closest to your belief?			93
	There is a personal God	78.49%	
	There is some God, spirit or life force	18.28%	
	I don't know if there is a God, spirit or life force	3.23%	
	There is no God, spirit or life force	0.00%	
How often do you attend religious services?			93
	Never	0.00%	
	Only on special occasions such as Christmas or Eastern	2.15%	
	Less than once a year	0.00%	
	About once or twice a year	1.08%	
	Several times a year	4.30%	
	About once a month	1.08%	
	Two to three times a month	16.13%	
	Weekly or more	75.27%	
How concerned are clergy in your church about the environment?			88
	They are concerned about the environment	21.59%	
	They are somewhat concerned about the environment	37.50%	
	They are neither concerned nor unconcerned about the environment	11.36%	
	They are somewhat unconcerned about the environment	9.09%	
	They are unconcerned about the environment	1.14%	
	I don't know how concerned they are	17.05%	
	I don't go to church	2.27%	
Should the environment have a bigger place in your church?			88
	Yes, a much bigger place	43.18%	

	Yes, a bigger place	47.73%	
	The current situation is sufficient	6.82%	
	No, it should have a smaller place	0.00%	
	No, it should have a much smaller place	0.00%	
	I don't go to church	2.27%	
Do you discuss environmental issues with other church members?			88
	Yes, I do	51.14%	
	Yes, I do but not very often	42.05%	
	No, but I do want to	4.55%	
	No, and I don't want to discuss environmental issues	1.14%	
	I don't go to church	1.14%	
If you discuss environmental issues with other church members, how do they respond?			88
	They don't see it as an issue that is relevant for the church	11.36%	
	They deny the science or the severity of the issue	5.68%	
	They agree on the severity but don't undertake action	47.73%	
	They agree and are willing to help addressing environmental issues	28.41%	
	I don't discuss environmental issues	5.68%	
	I don't go to church	1.14%	
Churches should take actively part in the political debates surrounding issues such as climate change			88
	Yes, I completely agree	73.86%	
	Yes, I agree	26.14%	
	Neither agree nor disagree	0.00%	
	No, I disagree	0.00%	
	No, I strongly disagree	0.00%	

Are you a member, volunteer or do you financially support any secular environmental organisations (such as WWF, Transition Town or Friends of the Earth)			88
	Yes, I do	79.55%	
	No, I don't but I do want to	10.23%	
	No, and I don't want to	10.23%	
Do you think that religious organisations and secular environmental organisations should collaborate?			88
	Yes, I completely agree	57.95%	
	Yes, I agree	37.50%	
	Neither agree nor disagree	3.41%	
	No, I disagree	1.14%	
	No, I strongly disagree	0.00%	

Please, tell to what extend you agree or disagree with the following statements	Yes, I completely agree	Yes, I agree	Neither agree nor disagree	No, I disagree	No, I strongly disagree	N
The Bible is the inspired and infallible word of God	16.30%	34.78 %	21.74%	17.39%	9.78%	92
I do not have any objections against same sex marriage	24.18%	25.27 %	20.88%	19.78%	9.89%	91
When humans interfere with nature it often produces disastrous consequences	39.13%	51.09 %	9.78%	0.00%	0.00%	92
Humans were meant to rule over the rest of nature	5.49%	12.09 %	20.88%	30.77%	30.77%	91
God is present in nature	63.04%	30.43 %	4.35%	2.17%	0.00%	92
I have experienced the presence of God when I have been in nature	50.00%	35.87 %	13.04%	1.09%	0.00%	92
My faith in an important motivator in addressing environmental issues	64.13%	30.43 %	5.43%	0.00%	0.00%	92

Appendix 7: List of all in-depth interviewees

David: Retired geography teacher and active in conservation projects.

Robert: Retired Anglican priest and trying to make the Church of England more engaged with environmental issues.

Jonathan: Retired and a member of an Evangelical Anglican Church. Active member of the Green Party and stood for elections.

Jenny: Scientist and active in secular groups. Member of an Evangelical Anglican church.

Tom: Leader of a large community garden project but also active in his own church

Anna: Long term member of secular environmental organisations. Set up her own eco-group at her church.

Hannah: Active member of Green Christian and helps organising various things for them.

Elisabeth: Worked for various development organisations but is now retired. Used to be member of a church with lots of attention for environmental issues and other social issues but her current church is much less so.

Bethany: Retired biology teacher. Part of a small eco-group at her own church (Anglican)

Helen: Became interested in environmental issues through the current chaplain of Green Christian.

Catherine: Relative new member of Green Christian. Involved in Fairtrade and the Liberal Democrats. She attends a Baptist church.

Harry: Active member of Green Christian and retired Methodist minister

William: Active member of Green Christian and retired. Became interested in environmental issues through Green Christian. Member of a charismatic Evangelical church.

Andrew: Retired Baptist minister and currently chaplain for Green Christian. He is very active in Green Christian.

Adam: Very active within Green Christian and responsible for all sorts of activities. Came into contact with Green Christian after spending much time with secular environmental groups. Attends a small Anglican village church.

Pete: Former leader of a transition town like initiative near Exeter. He is a Quaker himself

Ian: Emeritus professor and strongly involved wind energy.

Lucy: Very active member of Green Christian and organises all sorts of things for them and a member of an Evangelical Anglican church.

Georgie: Former leader of an energy community but is still active in the organisation. Has an active spiritual practice

Phil: Retired and a Labour party member. Involved with transport issues. Only came across Green Christian at a later age.

Becky: Active Green Christian member and responsible for its website. Retired and also active for Global Justice Now

Thomas: Academic with a PhD in philosophy from Oxford. Attends an Anglican church

Leader, eco-church: One of the leaders of the eco-church and senior lecturer at Exeter University

Male member eco-church: Active churchgoer with interest in environmental issues. Works at Exeter University

Director Theology A Rocha: Works full-time at A Rocha and has a PhD in eco-theology

Chair Green Christian: Leader of Green Christian (volunteer) and also works for English Heritage.

An interview with another retired Anglican priest took also place but the recorder failed during the interview. As such it was more an informal interview with only written notes afterwards.

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